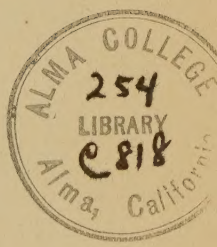
LITTLE SERMONS ON THE CATECHISM

FROM THE ITALIAN

OF

COSIMO CORSI

Cardinal-Archbishop of Pisa



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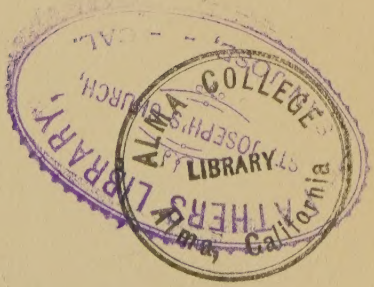

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Archbishop of New York

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Take heed to thyself and to doctrine: be earnest in them.

For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.—I. Tim. iv, 16.

✠COSIMO

Cardinal-Archbishop

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A COMPLETE COURSE

OF

Instructions in Christian Doctrine

I. On Man's Last End

Greatly mistaken are those who believe and claim that the Christian life is made up of nothing but difficulties, denials and sacrifices. This impression is proof that they have never really tried to live this life. Had they done so they would know that it has more delights than difficulties. Charity, for instance, is, according to our Divine Lord, the essence of the Divine Commandments. Now what is more agreeable to the heart of man than charity and love? Love is life and strength, says St. Augustine, and he who loves his work feels not hardship, suffers not by fatigue, because he loves his task and finds his delight in it.

Dear brethren, the difficulties encountered in the Christian life are due mostly to the fact that the exalted destiny for which God has created us, and towards which our every desire and action should be directed, is not properly appreciated.

Many Christians are worldly minded. They love that which is vain, prize that which is deceitful, seek that which instead of satisfying the heart, causes but dissatisfaction and discontent.

God alone is our beginning (Apoc. i, 8), and must be our only and our last aim. Without Him we cannot find real peace nor true happiness. This truth will to-day form the subject of our contem-

plation, so that you may be induced in future to direct all your thoughts and actions towards this exalted and blissful end for which we were all created.

All created things are imperfect and perishable; hence, incapable of ever satisfying the desires of our souls, which are immortal and crave imperishable happiness. And thus it is that the infinite Good alone, in which all happiness is contained, namely God, can satisfy and appease our desires.

Material pleasures, worldly possessions, cannot give this happiness to men. Instead of satisfying the human heart they involve it in cares and unrest. Man's happiness is accomplished only in his union with the Supreme Good, which is his ordained last end, and this union is achieved by the knowledge and love of God. Therefore King David says that his desire will be satisfied when his gaze shall rest upon the glory of the Lord (Ps. xvi, 15).

If, then, happiness is the last end of man, and if happiness consists in the knowledge and love of God, it follows that we shall not attain this end in the present life, but we can in this life merit happiness in the future life. This conclusion shows us, at the same time, the means of being happy even in this world, in so far as it is possible. The happiness which will be completed and perfected in Heaven has its inception and origin in this world. The just, who now are most intimately united to their Supreme Good—to God—and who will reign with Him throughout eternity, entered into this union before their death. Hence, sanctifying grace which unites by the bonds of love the servants of God with their Divine Master, so that God dwells in them and they in Him, is the root of future glory (John iv, 6).

In this way there exists, even in this life, a certain participation in the real and eternal happiness.

The joy and delight which the love of God produces in the hearts of the just is so great that in it consists the highest good which man can enjoy here on earth, a delight far surpassing all the pleasures and possessions of the world. And the more intimately the soul unites itself with God, through the sacred bonds of love, the more contented and happy it feels. Instead of craving earthly goods it despises them.

Let us understand this properly, dear brethren. We were not born to stay in this world forever. The present life is but a short pilgrimage. Our true home is Heaven. The Lord did not create us for perishable goods, fleeting pleasures, nor the vanities of the world. He created us for Himself, and we shall be discontented and unhappy until we find our rest in Him. Worldly pleasures and sinful enjoyment are assuredly no preparation for the attainment of our last destination, *i. e.,* eternal happiness; on the contrary, they bring to us, even in this life, bitter remorse of conscience, and in the future life everlasting death. Hence, we should abhor sin more than any other evil in the world. Sin is the only obstacle to the attainment of our last end; it alone will cause us to lose that end. Neither poverty nor lowly position, neither ignorance in the ways of the world, nor other worldly disadvantage, can prevent the attainment of our last end. Mortal sin alone can rob us of this destiny; for the unrepentant sinner is reserved the sad fate of burning forever in the flames of hell. With what zeal, therefore, and with what consolation, should we strive towards our last end and happiness. For this reason, then, whatever your vocation or occupation, make, once for all, the firm resolution to do everything for the glory of God.

At the first moment of your awakening in the morning, and from time to time during the day, lift up your heart to God, and offer up

all you do for His honor and glory. You will find yourself filled with the holy love of God, and with God's grace you will make continued progress in virtue.

Thus you will finally pass from the joys of a truly Christian life into the inexpressible delights of heavenly bliss. Amen.

II. The Divinity of the Catholic Religion: By Its Founder and Its Doctrine

When the time appointed and announced by the prophets had arrived, God fulfilled His promise, and sent the Messias to redeem mankind; the Divine Teacher to lead men back to the knowledge of the truth; the Supreme Law Giver in order to found His Religion, of which the law of Moses was only a preparation and a type. This Messias was Jesus Christ, from all eternity the Son of God, equal to the Father, becoming incarnate to redeem mankind. Hence, the Religion which He instituted while upon earth, and which we have the happiness of professing, must be Divine. To make this clear I shall produce proofs for you in this instruction. The knowledge and comprehension of these proofs are of the greatest importance; for those Christians who do not know them, are, in those days of unbelief, exposed to the greatest perils in the domain of faith. In proof of the Divinity of our Holy Religion we can point to a number of miraculous facts which God alone could accomplish. To-day we will occupy ourselves with the close consideration of two of these proofs, reserving the remainder for our next instruction.

These two are, first, the saintliness of its Founder; second, the sanctity of its doctrines.

The godliness of the founder of a religion is an essential condition, as it demonstrates that the religion itself comes from God. Our Religion was brought to this earth by the Divine Lord, Jesus Christ Himself, the perfection of all virtues. This alone would suffice to prove the Divinity of His Religion.

Jesus Christ possessed in perfection all virtues, so that even if He had not told us Himself that He was the Son of God, we could

not regard Him as mere man. In His own person He set before us the fulness of all virtues in the most perfect degree. What obedience to the orders of His Heavenly Father, what zeal for His glory! His whole life was devoted to the salvation of mankind. What tedious journeys, what hardships, what difficulties did He subject Himself to during His public activities as Teacher! He did not wait for the sinner to come to Him, He sought him out Himself.

And what could be compared to the benevolence with which He showed kindness to all who turned to Him, even, indeed, to those who would not ask His aid, to His enemies even. Who ever turned to Him for help without obtaining it? And how great was this love! His love for mankind was a holy love; He loved all men, He loved them in God and because of God. His love was tender and compassionate. We see this in the miracle of the feeding of the multitude and in the raising of Lazarus, as also in the tears He shed over the ill-fated Jerusalem. Particularly did He love the poor, and He declared that His Divine Mission applied especially to them. He promised special graces and abundant reward to all those who would be charitable to the poor.

As in public life, so was Jesus Christ virtue itself in His private life. Although Lord of the Universe, He would be the poorest of all men. He who had no need of doing penance was penitential in His life. He fasted for forty days, and had no place to lay His head. He Himself walked the narrow and rough path upon which He has invited us to follow Him.

The virtue of Humility is not less in evidence in our Divine Lord —humility in demeanor, humility in words. He called Himself the Son of man. Humility even in His miracles, for He ascribed all honor to His Heavenly Father; humility in suffering injustice, humility in all the ill-treatment to which He was subjected.

In order to behold His virtues in their greatest splendor, we must contemplate Jesus Christ in the hours of His Passion and death. There He demonstrated His magnanimity, His meekness, and the burning desire to suffer all torments and even a most cruel death for man's salvation. He was patient as a lamb that is led to slaughter. He was silent amidst the mockeries and false accusations with which He was overwhelmed. Oh, what exalted virtues are there offered for our admiration. This was the author of our Christian Religion!

You will say that Jesus Christ united in His Person every virtue in the most perfect degree because He was God. You are right, and you must come to the conclusion that the Religion which He brought to this earth must be Divine, because it comes from Him who is God.

Secondly, the doctrines of this Holy Religion, which Jesus Christ Himself brought to us, must excite our admiration by their simplicity and sanctity. Though plain enough for the most simple, even the best informed may learn and profit by the knowledge of this doctrine. And the exalted, sacred and beneficial information it contains! It would be impossible for me to exhaust this subject, but the little that I shall say on the subject will suffice to prove to you that such a Religion could not possibly be the work of man. It is holy in what it teaches of God, of our nature, and of our destiny. It teaches the existence of one God, the Creator of all things; it explains His perfections, His works, our principal obligations towards Him; it teaches us that man was not created in the present state, in which he is subjected to so many evils, but that all these evils arose from sin; that man in his mortal body possesses an immortal soul, and that both were given him in order to know God, to love Him and to serve Him; that after this life there is another, in which the good and the wicked will be rewarded or punished accord-

ing to their good or evil deeds; that heaven will be the reward for the virtuous, and hell the punishment of the wicked.

As the doctrines, so do the mysteries of our Religion prove sufficiently through their sublimity that they come from God. Man never could have invented them, because they surpass human reason.

The Commandments and prohibitions of our Religion, regulating our obligations in regard to ourselves and our neighbors, lead to perfect virtue. They promote temperance, sobriety and patience, and forbid us to do or desire anything that is not honorable and holy; they direct us to take Jesus Christ for our model in all our actions; they condemn idleness, pride, and impurity, and require us to make proper use of our time. What doctrine could be more reasonable, holier and better suited to make us virtuous and perfect.

This holy Religion requires of us a great abhorrence of sin. Should we be so unfortunate, however, as to fall into sin, it not only allows us to hope for pardon, but even commands us to seek it. What could be more consoling than this precept? It obliges us to make speedy return from the dangerous path of sin, so that our souls may not be exposed to the danger of destruction.

In regard to our neighbor, our Religion directs us to regard all mankind as our brethren. It bids us to love our neighbor as ourselves, enemies not excepted; it wills that we should love the sinner as much as we detest his sins. What a grand doctrine of faith, dear brethren! What a beautiful doctrine of morals! How sublime, how worthy of God! Let us then admire this Religion that is so holy in its doctrine; let us admire it in its work for the sanctification of its members. How abundant are the means of salvation that it offers us! You see how a serious consideration of the sanctity of the doctrine of our sublime Religion proves that it is Divine.

If our Religion proceeds from God, on account of the sanctity of

its Author, as well as of its doctrine, then we owe it a profound reverence, stanch adherence, unremitting love and fidelity. But let us especially awaken sentiments of thanksgiving towards God, who has granted us the great good fortune to be born in His Religion. Let us endeavor to persevere faithfully in fulfilling its holy teaching, so that at the end of our days we may be mercifully received into the glorious realm of its Divine Author. Amen.

III. The Divinity of the Catholic Religion: By the Prophecies and Miracles

Our belief in the truth of our holy Religion is based upon the revealed Word of God. If our faith is to be firm and steadfast it must be based on the authority of God, else it would not be that supernatural virtue which is the foundation of our sanctification. It would rather be a purely human act of the mind, incapable of meriting salvation, because instead of placing our trust in God, who is the infallible truth and the source of our happiness, we would be trusting in our own feeble reason, a reason subjected to delusions and of itself incapable of rising to the supernatural and of grasping the eternal Mysteries of God.

This, however, does not prohibit us from satisfying ourselves that our Religion, with its sublime Mysteries, does, in very fact, emanate from God. Let us contemplate this weighty point so that our submission, as St. Paul says, may be a reasonable service, and that we may the better be able to meet the attacks on our sublime Religion by ungodly and unbelieving men, who, by seemingly plausible reasons, seek to deceive the faithful, thus leading them to share in the perdition that they prepare for themselves. In this investigation we have no desire to venture further than St. Paul advises, and we shall refrain from undue pondering upon the great Mysteries of faith which Religion teaches, and which are beyond the power of our imperfect minds to comprehend, for in these things our faith must include a complete submission to the infallible word of God. Hence, it is a question of inquiry into the proofs and the testimony which God has put before us, in order that we may appreciate the

fact that our Religion comes from Him. It would lead us too far if we were to give a detailed account of all these proofs. I shall, therefore, only mention two of them, in addition to those which I explained to you last Sunday:

1. An important proof of the Divinity of our holy Religion is found in the fulfilments of the prophecies which relate to this Religion. To foretell future events is a privilege which belongs to God alone, before whom the past and the future are known in equal degree as the present. We know that the mysteries of the true Religion were announced many centuries before they came to pass. The Prophet Daniel, in his time, foretold that the Messias would come after seventy weeks of years; that is, four hundred and ninety years; and Jesus Christ was born precisely at the time thus foretold (Dan. ix, 24, 25).

The Prophets foretold, moreover, that the Messias was to be born of a Virgin. He was to be born at Bethlehem in a lowly condition, and he would be adored by the Wise Men; that He would flee into Egypt; that He would perform many miracles; that He would be sold for thirty pieces of silver; that at the time of His Passion His Apostles would forsake Him; that He would have ignominy and disgrace heaped upon Him; that the soldiers would divide His garments and cast lots for His coat; that they would pierce His hands and His feet; that He would be crucified; that He would rise again from the dead; that He would ascend into Heaven; that the Jews in punishment for their crime would be abandoned by God to their hardness of heart; that they would cease to be called the chosen people of God; that the Lord in their stead would call the Gentiles to the Kingdom of Heaven; that Jerusalem would be captured and laid waste, the Temple would be destroyed, and the Kingdom would perish, and that the surviving

Jews would be dispersed over the whole earth, and so continue until the end of the world, without a king of their own, without Temple, altar, sacrifice.

All these prophecies, and many others which for lack of time I cannot mention, were fulfilled to the letter. It is only necessary to compare the Old and the New Testament in order to make their fulfilment evident. All that which was foretold about the Messias, was actually fulfilled in Christ. Jesus Christ Himself referred to these proofs in order to put to shame the unbelief of the Jews. Search the prophecies, said He, and you will see that they have been fulfilled in Me.

Jesus Christ Himself prophesied many things in proof of His Divinity, and of the Divinity of the Religion to found which He had come. He foretold His death with the circumstances attending it. He foretold Peter's denial, the betrayal of Judas, that after three days He would rise again. He foretold the persecutions which His disciples would have to endure, the spreading of the Gospel, and the miracles which His Apostles would work. He also foretold the fall of Jerusalem. These prophecies were all fulfilled to the letter. If such prophetic power can only come from God, then we must admit that God revealed these truths to the Prophets: that God Himself spoke through their mouths, that Christ was God, and that the true Religion must be the one in which the things foretold came to pass.

2. Another powerful proof of the Divinity of our Religion are the numberless miracles performed in its favor by Jesus Christ Himself, by the Apostles and their successors, miracles so undeniable that even their enemies were compelled to acknowledge them as such. Strong evidence, indeed, are these miracles. In vain have the ungodly labored with all their strength and malice, and

still labor, to weaken the strength of these striking proofs. A single one of these miracles would suffice to bear witness to the work of God, and by its testimony confirm the Religion of Jesus Christ.

Miracles can only come from God. Satan cannot work miracles.

As for historical testimony to the miracles of our Lord, it could not be more complete nor more irrefutable. They were publicly performed, as, for instance, the Raising of Lazarus, the Healing of the Man with the Dropsy, of the Man Born Blind, the Multiplication of Loaves, the Resurrection of the Son of the Widow of Nain; and many others.

They have been attested by a large number of witnesses—Jews and Gentiles—by the most credible witnesses, even by those whose interest it was to deny them. The facts have been recorded by contemporary writers and have come down to us. Not only in the Gospel, which should be proof sufficient, but also in secular writings they find their confirmation. And not only did Jesus Christ and His disciples work miracles, but in the bosom of the Catholic Church there have been at all times bishops, priests and lay persons who performed miracles. In the lives of the saints, in the history of the Church, and in other chronicles, we find recorded miracles which have been substantiated beyond all doubt.

The miracle is a means by which God manifests Himself and His truth: for, on the one hand a miracle can only come from God; on the other, God cannot work a miracle to establish or confirm an error because in so doing He would pledge His word to a falsehood which is impossible to Divine nature. Hence, it follows that the fulfilment of the prophecies, and the confirmation of our Religion by visible miracles on the part of God, prove that it is the Divine Religion, the only true Religion of God, and hence the only one that leads to salvation. For this reason, then, we ought to give it our

firm and faithful belief and loyalty; we must love and cherish, obey it, comply in all our thoughts and actions to its holy teachings, and thank God for the grace to be called to this heavenly light, asking Him to grant us courage and endurance in the profession of this holy faith, living and dying. Amen.

IV. Faith

Our Divine Redeemer at one time reproved His disciples for their timidity and faint-heartedness when they, frightened by the waves of the sea which threatened to swallow up their small craft, awakened Him from sleep and besought Him to save them. They gave proof of little faith and well deserved censure, because Jesus was with them, and wind and waves could do no injury to Him who created them, nor to those under His protection. Let it be our care to see that we do not deserve the same rebuke. The Lord in His mercy has granted us the gift of being born in the bosom of the Catholic Church, where the true faith is alone preserved: it would be unpardonable if we did not appreciate this great grace. It will avail us little to have been given the true faith of Jesus Christ, if finally we should be lost for all eternity. Let us see, therefore, what faith is, and how necessary the virtue of faith is for every one of us: let us learn to beware of that presumption which would be over-curious, and of that indolence which would be indifferent to the knowledge of things divine. Both these faults are only too often the cause of Christians losing the faith.

Amongst the virtues that have God for their object, faith takes first place. It is a heavenly gift, a supernatural light, through which, inwardly enlightened, we firmly hold as true what the Lord has revealed to His holy Church. Without this virtue, it is impossible for the Christian to please God and to attain salvation. Faith is a gift of God, because the Lord invites us to it out of His mercy, without any merit of ours. It is called supernatural because it elevates us to the knowledge of Mysteries which far surpass our

natural powers of comprehension. We are given absolute certainty of the information received. Based upon the veracity of the Most High, who could neither deceive Himself, nor any one else, we acquire absolute certainty of the things revealed. It follows that we have more certainty in regard to the teachings of our faith, than in regard to things which we know either through our understanding or through our senses. This teaching of faith we receive from God through this Holy Church, which God Himself founded as the immovable pillar of truth, and to which He has promised His assistance unto the end of the world.

The Church must, therefore, be infallible in all that she teaches and presents for belief, and, as we on our part are obliged to subject ourselves to its decrees in all matters of faith and morals, it follows that we have every assurance of not falling into error. There is only one God and there can be but one faith. It is necessary that Christians should be thoroughly instructed in their holy faith so that they may be able to observe its precepts. Alas, there are only too many Christians who, although born in the Catholic Church, and given the light of faith, live on in culpable ignorance of the things which they ought to know, in order not to be Christians only in name, but also in fact. As St. Gregory remarks, Divine Providence has concealed from our understanding the understanding of its Mysteries, so that by submitting our reason to the faith, and maintaining as unalterably true every thing that faith presents for our belief, we acquire for ourselves rich treasures of merits. Were these Mysteries revealed to our reason, our faith could not have the merit which it now receives through obedience and confidence.

Since God has willed that some matters should be incomprehensible to man's understanding, how foolish are they who attempt to

penetrate with their feeble intellect the inscrutable depths of the Divine Mysteries.

Faith, my dear Christians, requires profound humility and willing obedience. He, who in matters of faith consults only his reason, shows that he will not submit himself to the word of God. But just as faulty as idle speculation is indifference in matters of faith.

According to the world of our Divine Redeemer Himself, the two chief commandments of the faith are: to love God with our whole heart, and our neighbor as ourselves.

As far as the first precept is concerned, our hearts are apt to fall victims to the attractions of the world, at the expense of divine things. So many Christians find enough time for worldly pleasures, idle, even sinful, conversation, and seldom think of devoting a little part of their time to God in prayer. Like irrational animals, they eat, drink, play, rest, but never do anything that would show that they are believing Christians. If they do pray occasionally, they act like a body without a soul. Their lips move, but their hearts are busy with worldly things. Of them, the reproach is true that the Lord made to the Israelites through the mouth of the Prophet Isaias: "This people glorify Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." How seldom do such lukewarm Christians receive the Sacraments! How lacking in respect is their demeanor in church? They keep not holy the day of the Lord; they will not attend sermons and instructions to improve themselves in the knowledge of the truths of the faith, and to enable themselves to walk with more security in the path of salvation. Do you suppose that such coldness in the love of God fulfils the chief commandment of our faith? Surely not.

In transgressing this greatest of commandments, they also transgress the other, which enjoins them to love their neighbor. If

you want proof of the inseparability of these two laws, read the lives of the saints and you will find that many of them fasted so as to be able to feed the poor with the food which they denied themselves; others, in order to free the prisoners, took the chains of slavery upon themselves; they deprived themselves of their garments for the good of their neighbor; they gave up their fortunes for the support of the poor. But how very different it is in our days; what scandals among Christians, what slander, calumny and deceit. Heartless Christians look complacently upon their neighbor's misfortunes. Few, indeed, there are in these days who restrict their expenditures in unnecessary things in order to support the needy, in order to contribute to worthy charities.

Thus we see how faith, unfortunately, no longer prevails with many Christians; the faith which they profess is not the faith of the Gospel, but the faith of modern worldliness. Faith requires that we be instructed in the Divine truths; that we submit our reason to them with a willing humility; that we practise them actively in our lives.

In order to be good Catholics, we must firmly believe everything that the Lord presents for our belief through His holy Church. Those who have the faith and do not act in accordance with its precepts will be lost for all eternity; they can have no part in the Kingdom of God. May the Lord preserve us all from this great misfortune. Amen.

V. The Charity of Jesus

The charity of the Heart of Jesus was thoroughly demonstrated at the grave of Lazarus. When the Saviour saw the sorrow of the sisters and friends of the departed, He was moved to compassion and repaired to the place where they had laid the remains of Lazarus and worked there the great miracle of raising him from the dead. And the bystanders exclaimed in amazement, "Behold, how He loved him" (John xi, 36).

Lazarus is an image of the human race which, through sin, was dead. Jesus demonstrated His love for all mankind in the person of Lazarus. He wept over the death of their souls and wished to restore them to life and everlasting bliss. If we consider even the least of the blessings which He has heaped upon us, we have indeed reason to exclaim: Behold, how Jesus loves us. Let me recall to your mind some of the manifestations of the charity of Jesus Christ towards us, and some of the blessings which He continues to bestow upon us daily, despite our thoughtlessness and even ingratitude; and let the contemplation of His love move our hearts to give Him our love in return.

While dwelling in the inaccessible light of His infinite glory, God was for mankind a God of Majesty, an object of awe. When, upon Mount Horeb, He appeared amid lightning and thunder, He spread consternation and fear amongst His chosen people. What, therefore, did the eternal Word do to render Himself beloved by mankind and to win their hearts? He assumed human nature, He enveloped the splendor of His divinity as with a veil, He took upon Himself the infirmities of our nature, in short,

He, who in the beginning of time had been the model for mankind, made Himself in the fulness of time a man like unto us.

Behold Him, then, as a sweet babe; behold Him in a lowly stable, swathed in coarse clothes, resting on a mother's breast, how charming and graciously sweet. These baby lips cannot speak, yet how conversant they already are with the language of love. His eyes, filled with tenderness, glance around, they are inviting mankind; He stretches forth His tiny hands appealing to us, the sole object of His concern.

Behold Him at Nazareth in an humble cottage, the delight of His Virgin Mother; in the temple among the Wise Men, see upon His countenance the bright light of divine wisdom. And at the age of manhood, how His loving heart won the multitude. His disciples and the crowds that followed Him, remembered at the sound of His sweet name the characteristics by which He had been foretold through the Prophets. He was the faithful Friend, the tender, loving Father; the fruitful vine that nourishes its tender shoots with its life sap; the immaculate lamb that sacrificed itself for us, and in its Blood cleanses from sin those who believe in Him; the rich master who invites us to His heavenly banquet; the good Shepherd, finally, who follows the lost sheep over rocks and precipices, takes it in His arms and refreshes it, quenching its thirst and appeasing its hunger.

Could our divine Saviour have shown Himself in a more appealing way to the heart of man? It is easy to understand that the Apostles forsook all that was dearest to them, to follow Him, and so did follow Him the disciples, pious women, officials, persons of high and low rank, the populace from Judea, Samaria, from Sidon, Tyre, Galilea: all were entranced and attracted by the marvelous potency of His noble charity.

Still more remarkable is the love which Jesus showed towards sinners, towards His enemies, towards those who trampled under foot the law of God. He was all love, all graciousness; He sat with them at table, sympathized with their sufferings and gave them aid. He restored speech to the dumb, made the lame walk, cleansed the lepers, restored sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, health to the sick, life to the dead.

But souls were the chief object of His loving solicitude. The souls of men were chiefly to experience the gracious effects of His boundless charity, and not alone those of good will, but also those that were unworthy. He associated with public sinners in order to draw them to Himself; granted pardon to the sinful Mary Magdalen; He instituted that tremendous mystery of love wherein He gives Himself to men as food and drink, so as to unite Himself more closely with them. He gave the sweet name of friend to Judas even as this perfidious disciple was about to betray His Master; He resigned Himself to a most cruel and ignominious death in order to give eternal life to all mankind: He heard the petition of the repentant thief: He interceded even for His executioners and besought pardon for them.

What great love, indeed, truly the love of a God! The love with which He attracted men who associated with Him here on earth was merely the symbol and pledge of that hidden and potent love with which He wishes to win our hearts. My brethren, you yourselves must bear witness to those tender feelings and grateful love which Jesus has awakened in your hearts. He has given you many proofs of His love. We owe it to Him that we are able to perceive the vanity of the world: His loving hand touches our hard hearts, moves them to sincere contrition, and unites them in the gentle bonds of love to His Sacred Heart. Can

we recall all this without being moved; without wishing to return love for love?

Behold the patience with which He seeks out the sinner to bring him back to His loving Heart. In gentle tones He speaks to the sinner's heart, saying to him: "Art thou not tired opposing Me? Dost thou not know that I love thee now as ever, that I wait for thee to come to my Heart? Look at Me, I am fastened to the Cross for love of thee. It is possible that thou still hast the heart to offend a God who has loved thee unto death upon the Cross, so that life may be given thee?"

My dear brethren, men must have hearts of stone indeed if so much love, if such tenderness of the Heart of Jesus is unable to stir them, if they do not love in return this loving victim of our sins. Let us love Him therefore, because He desires our love, and deserves our love. Amen.

VI. Divine Providence

The omnipotent hand of God created the whole world and everything therein contained. His Providence watches over all things. It orders the course and the movements of the stars, it preserves all creatures, giving them the means necessary for the performance of the work for which they were created. The light of reason suffices for the comprehension of this truth. Even the pagans acknowledged it. Yes, dear brethren, the eye of Providence is ever resting upon the works of His creation and the smallest insect, no less than the largest of the planets, is the object of the Lord's solicitude.

Although God has called into existence all creatures, and watches over and preserves them, yet He pays special attention to the needs of mankind. He Himself assures us that not a hair on our head is overlooked by Him. Each one of us, says St. Augustine, is the object of His particular care, as if he were alone in the world.

Hence, let us to-day contemplate the greatness, the wisdom and the love of divine Providence, and how worthy it is of our admiration. By divine Providence is understood, as St. Thomas remarks, the well-ordered arrangement of every means of which God makes use to attain His object, and by which He guides His creatures so that they may attain the end for which they were created. Hence, it follows, continues this holy teacher, that there is for almighty God no chance happening, although to the eyes of men many things and events appear to be accidental. His infinite Wisdom knows exactly everything that happens, has happened, or will happen, and His Providence has ordained, or permitted, all things that happen with a view to the exalted aims of His divine sovereignty. These are: His glorification, the revelation of His omnipo-

tence, of His mercy and justice, and the well-being of His creatures, particularly the being gifted with reason, namely, man.

Divine Providence embraces all creatures in heaven and upon earth, the most exalted Seraphim as well as the smallest insect, and the most insignificant plant. For, says the angelical doctor, it is just as certain that all creatures are dependent upon Divine maintenance as it is certain that they depended upon God for their existence. He covers the fish with scales, the birds with feathers, the animals with wool, the trees with bark. He gives food to the animals who neither sow nor reap; He furnishes them with agility and ability to seek food for themselves and for their young; He nourishes the flowers, grasses and herbs by means of rain and water, and He rules with power and mercy everything from one end of the world to the other.

Above all, however, He watches over and cares for mankind, with the solicitude of a loving father. Not content with having placed at man's disposal the whole created world, in order to provide him with food, clothing and medicaments, He fortifies him also by the assistance of His grace, so as to incite him to do good; He renders light the burden of the Divine Commandments, and sweet the yoke of His law, and guides man upon an easy path to eternal happiness, for which He was created.

The Lord so ardently desires our salvation, that, in addition to all the gifts natural and supernatural, which He grants us so abundantly as means to attain our last end, He has commissioned His angels to be our particular guardians.

Furthermore, divine Providence disposes for our best the disasters, persecutions, diseases and misfortunes which happen as a result of sin and of man's free will. The Lord sends adversity and sufferings, also, that the soul may be purified of its faults through these trials;

that it may conquer its passions, and perfect itself through the exercise of virtue, to which these trials inspire.

Let our hearts, therefore, in confidence seek comfort in the infinite and loving Providence of God. Let us acknowledge with fervent gratitude the benefits which He has bestowed upon us, and let us accept with resignation and patience the crosses that He sends us for our advantage and spiritual betterment. Beware of murmuring and complaining at God's Providence; rather let us adore in humility His magnanimous dispositions.

How may we, indeed, presume to question divine Providence? Who are we that we would dare to argue with the Lord? And yet there are such who venture to do this, who in their weak understanding dare to criticise the rulings of infinite Wisdom. They do this particularly as regards the division of temporal goods. Why, they ask, is one rich and another poor? Why have some an abundance of good things and others not sufficient for their existence? They claim that these dispositions are unjust, and in their impious rashness accuse the justice and goodness of God. A little thought and observation will show you that those who are rich in earthly possessions have cares and responsibilities; they have heavy obligations towards others, many opportunities of sinning, and hence are often in peril of losing their souls, just on account of their wealth. Though the poor have less of earthly comforts, they are in a better position to acquire treasures for heaven: they are closer to God, are more like Jesus Christ, their divine Model, who willed to be born in poverty; they have more opportunity to acquire merits for heaven, and greater certainty of gaining eternal glory. But even in the temporal success the poor have the advantage over the wealthy. Recent statistics show that among a number of successful men the great majority started out as farm and newspaper

boys, and only one in twelve was the son of rich parents. You see that even if you must make many sacrifices, your sons have twelve chances to the rich man's son's one to succeed in life.

Other unthinking people complain, for instance, when death comes and snatches away a youthful and promising son. God's ways are inscrutable, but He may have removed him from this world so that a longer life might not be the cause of his falling from virtue and grace. Again, it is objected that impious persons sometimes live long and that their undertakings are successful, while many a good and righteous man does not seem to be able to make any headway. Rarely is a man so bad that now and again he does not perform some good deed. It seems reasonable to think that God, in His justice, gives him a long life in order to reward him on earth for the good that he did, and to grant him time to be converted and work out his salvation.

The just man receives his reward in heaven, and the more he proves his virtue in the trials that God sends him, the greater will be his eternal reward.

Dear brethren, so we find divine Wisdom apparent in everything that it ordains and permits to happen. If things happen to our disadvantage, let us remember that it is impossible for our limited intellect to fathom the Lord's intentions. Let us rather repeat with the Apostles, "Oh, the depths of the riches, of the Wisdom and of the Knowledge of God. How incomprehensible are His judgments and how unsearchable His ways" (Rom. xi, 33).

The Lord watches over us with the greatest care. Let us confide in the all-powerful and all-wise divine Providence, whose solicitude for us will never fail, and let us adore humbly its inscrutable decrees which are all ordained for the divine glory and for our best interests. Amen.

VII. Divine Grace

Our Lord and God is an infinite spirit, who fills heaven and earth, and heaven and earth cannot compass Him. He is everywhere. According to His nature He is the infinite being. His presence is entire in every place; in His power He is active everywhere; He sees everything, knows everything: He perceives our most secret thoughts and actions, and hears our every word.

A realization of these divine perfections is calculated to arouse within us a holy fear of the Lord, and to restrain us from sin. How will one dare to do evil while remembering that God is everywhere and sees everything? The remembrance of these divine perfections will also inspire us with encouragement in the practise of virtue, as we must feel impelled so to act as God bids us if we duly realize that the eyes of the supreme Lord are upon us at all times. And, my dear brethren, you will feel yourselves drawn to the Lord with still greater zest if you contemplate the most gracious of all His perfections, namely, His infinite goodness, and of this I wish to speak to you now.

"Praise ye the Lord, for He is good: and His mercy endureth forever" (Ps. cxvii), the Psalmist exclaims. On all sides you are confronted by evidences of the infinite goodness of God; everywhere you may "see and taste how sweet the Lord is" (Ps. xxx). You hear nature exclaim: "There is a God, the author of everything good." "The Lord is sweet to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works" (Ps. cxliv).

The infinite goodness of our God called the world and the countless numbers of creatures into existence. This infinite goodness of

the divine Heart desires to render all His creatures truly happy, from the angels of heaven down to the insect that creeps in the grass of the fields. "All expect of thee that thou give them food in season. What thou givest to them they shall gather up: when thou openest thy hand, they shall all be filled with good" (Ps. ciii, 27).

Dear brethren, it is our special duty to praise the Lord our God with our whole hearts, and to glorify His adorable name in eternity, because upon us He has poured out the fulness of His grace, of His goodness and love. Can you count the graces, the favors and blessings with which He daily overwhelms you? Every moment of our lives, indeed, is a proof and a continuous testimony of His infinite goodness towards us. God is the origin and source of all that we are and have. Whom else have we to thank for our existence but His supreme goodness? To whom else do we owe our reasoning soul, our intelligence, which elevates us above other creatures, but to God? There was no need to create us; God might have allowed us to remain forever in chaos; we have done nothing and could do nothing to deserve the gift of life. But His goodness called us into existence; it created us and elevated us to the pinnacle of honor. He made man the most beautiful, the noblest and most eminent creature of this visible world. He gave us a body of marvelous construction. He fashioned our soul according to the supremest model, His own image and likeness. He gave us intelligence and a free and powerful will.

Yes, the hand of the Lord has opened and showered upon us proofs of His grace, the treasures of His goodness.

And did God's goodness rest there, in our creation? No, indeed, the hand that formed us also guides, preserves and elevates us; it orders all things, so as to provide us with everything needful. The sun, the moon, and the countless stars, which illuminate the vault

of heaven, all the beings, living and inanimate, that fill earth, air and water, they all were created for us, for our benefit, for our enjoyment. For us He makes the seeds in the fields give fruit a hundredfold; for us the golden grapes ripen on the heights; for us the trees are laden; for us the flowers send forth delightful fragrance; for our benefit the earth is endowed with treasures and bounties.

Does the Lord dispense only to the learned, only to the virtuous, these gifts, graces and blessings? No, dear brethren, our heavenly Father wills that all men, virtuous or not, partake of the inexhaustible source of His goodness. And this goodness transforms itself into mercy, and He would not the death of the sinner, but rather that he be converted and live (Ezech. xxxiii, 11), and so He gives to the sinner, as to the just, His great benefactions. The divine goodness, transformed into mercy, commands the sun to shed its light and warmth upon the sinner as upon the just, and the dew to fall alike upon the fields of the just and the unjust. Hence, "let us praise and glorify the Lord, for He is good" (Ps. cxvii, 1).

Yes, let us praise the Lord, for He is good. That is the expression of the lively gratitude with which we feel ourselves penetrated at the contemplation of the benefits received from God. And yet, all I have said so far is only a feeble picture of God's goodness to us. Must I remind you where the goodness of the Lord to us appeared in its fulness? Dear brethren, your faith answers me in the words of the apostle: "But when the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared: Not by the works of justice, which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us, by the laver of regeneration and renovation of the Holy Ghost; whom He hath poured forth upon us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour: That being justified by His grace we may be heirs according to hope of life everlasting" (Tit. iii, 4-7).

The eternal Son of God has loved us so that He came to suffer and die for us. Where is there a prince, who, in order to ransom a guilty subject from a death he justly deserved, would enjoin his son, his only son, to put on the garments of the criminal, to surrender himself into the hands of the executioners and give himself up to an undeserved and shameful death? Could such an example be found in all the world? No earthly father ever did such thing. God, however, who loves us and whose goodness is infinite, sacrificed for us His only begotten Son, in whom He was well pleased (Matt. xvii, 5). He covered Him with the garment of the guilty one, clothed Him with our human nature: He willed that He should suffer for us, that He should be a man of sorrows, the outcast of the people, and that He should die an ignominious death upon the Cross. "Having loved His own, who were in the world, He loved them to the end" (John xiii, 1). The Son of God died for us. Oh, Divine goodness! Oh, mercy of the Lord! With my whole heart I will praise thee for all eternity, "because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; nor wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption; thou has made known to me the ways of life" (Ps. xv, 10, 11). Oh, Divine goodness, how could I ever cease to trust in thee?

We see how the confidence in the goodness and mercy of our God is well founded and justified. But, dear brethren, the remembrance of His love towards us, of the priceless blessings which we have received from His infinite goodness, should fill us with confidence and admiration, and inflame our hearts with a lively affection and a sincere love for this tender Father, for this good God who has first loved us. Indeed, we must never again offend this God of goodness; we must not be disobedient to this best of Masters, to this tenderest of Fathers; and the resolution to walk in the way of His Commandments should be a steadfast one in our

hearts. Oh, that the Lord might no longer have reason to say of us: "I have brought up children and exalted them, but they have despised Me" (Is. 1, 2). Let us then earnestly resolve not to sin any more, and to bear in mind the words of the apostle: "The grace of God our Saviour hath appeared to all men, instructing us, that renouncing impiety and worldly desires, we should live soberly and justly and piously in this world" (Tit. ii, 11). Let us always have in mind the goodness of our God, and let us strive to contribute according to our best ability to His glorification, by practising good works and by endeavoring to render ourselves worthy to be received into that celestial kingdom to which He invites us, and which He has merited for us by His passion and His death upon the Cross. **Amen.**

VIII. Religious Indifference

The corruption of morals and the worldliness of mind and heart have made such progress in our days that the preachers of the divine Word are urgently exhorting their congregations to be on their guard lest these prevailing evils take deep root in their hearts. It has been found necessary to admonish even the faithful children of the Church to adhere firmly to the faith and not let themselves be separated from it, thus forfeiting their salvation. This great need is due to the unholy zeal of those who attempt, with great effort and with all the evil means placed at their disposal by the spirit of darkness, to do injury to the Church of Jesus Christ. They employ even the most unscrupulous and impious means in order to tear from her motherly heart those who are not on their guard, to take from them their faith.

One of the most injurious artifices which our enemies make use of to perplex and deceive the inexperienced and the weak in faith, is the advocacy of religious indifferentism; they seek to spread the false teaching that man may be saved in any religion whatsoever. This is a great and fatal error, not only contrary to natural reason and common sense, but in the highest degree displeasing to God.

Since there is but one God, and since God is the truth, therefore there can be but one truth. Since, furthermore, the religion which God revealed to man must be the truth, it follows that there can only be one true religion. And this one true religion, revealed by God, can be no other than the religion founded by the Lord Jesus Christ, the religion entrusted to the Church established by Him, the religion upon which He impressed the seal of His divinity, and to

which He granted those indispensable marks which distinguish the true Church, and to which, through God's mercy, we have the happiness of belonging. All other religions can only be the work of man, hence none of them are instituted by God; they are false religions and lead to destruction.

The only true and divine religion, of which our holy Church is the faithful guardian and infallible expounder, teaches us to detest sin, condemns heresy, combats vice, opposes the passions, and promotes virtue and sanctity; it requires our feeble understanding to submit to the truths of faith, demands humility and urges mortification. In these facts we have the reason why the Church is opposed by the ungodly and worldlings, either openly or in secret; for these reasons they seek to destroy a church that is condemning unceasingly their impious lives. And since they cannot conquer or destroy it, because they cannot destroy the truth, *i. e.*, God Himself, they endeavor at least to preach the godless doctrine of indifferentism, claiming that it is a matter of no account whether one professes this or that religion, and that man can be saved in any of them. They claim that they are free to select a creed that suits them better than the religion which is the only true one. And to cover up their own disgrace, and to walk without fear upon the path of sin, they seek to draw with them others, taking them away from the true religion and inducing them to accept creeds that are indulgent towards vice and worldliness, which the true Church can never be. Let us consider for a moment how absurd it is to assert that man can be saved in any religion whatsoever. If this could be true, then the religion of the Jews, of Mahomet, of the followers of Confucius, and many others in which Jesus Christ is denied, even the religion of idolators, would be good and true religions. In short, whether a religion taught vice or virtue, error or

truth, God or the devil, would make little difference. Could there be a more obvious absurdity, a greater insult to reason?

Perhaps the adherents of this cult of indifferentism, in their assertion that every religion is equally good and saving, mean only the religions which at least profess Christ. Even in this limited sense the assertion is impious and absurd. We know that the Protestant sects separated themselves from the true Church of Christ, that they forsook the true and revealed religion, in order to form, according to their views, a number of other forms of worship. We know that the Protestant sects again and again split into numerous religious factions. Doctrines they once zealously defended they have since almost universally rejected. The belief of the Lutherans is not that of the Calvinists; the Presbyterians again differ from Calvinists and Anglicans. Each of these sects has its own profession of faith, which is subject to revision at any time.

If, then, my brethren, it mattered so little what man believes, why all these innumerable sects? Why does each of them so zealously defend its particular set of tenets?

Indifferentism is not only contrary to reason and common sense, it is a grievous crime against God, and stands in direct opposition to His divine nature. Supposing that all religions were equally good, this would mean that God, who is truth itself and desires only the truth, is indifferent to error, that error and truth are equally agreeable to Him, that both contribute to His glory in the same degree. It means to say that God proclaims both truth and falsehood. To claim that man can be saved in any religion is the same as saying that God never revealed to mankind that which should be believed; it is a denial of revelation and the accusation of tyranny and oppression made against God, in so far as one religion requires mortification while another

does not. It means that God does not trouble Himself about what His faithful believe or do, and then we may ask what need of a religion at all?

Dear brethren, are not your hearts chilled with horror at the mere recital of such impieties? And yet they are the logical conclusions of indifferentism, which asserts that every religion is good and suffices to save men's souls. The only begotten Son of God clothed Himself in our mortal flesh and lived among men. He preached and taught His religion: He founded a visible Church, which He made the keeper of His divine doctrine. He imparted His spirit to her; He promised to her His assistance until the end of time, so that she can never fall into error; He commissioned her, in His stead, to be the sole infallible teacher of the truth; He sent His Apostles to all nations to teach all the truths which He Himself had preached, and threatened with eternal damnation those who would not believe them. He confirmed these truths by signs and miracles; He sealed them with His own Blood, and after doing and suffering so much to put mankind in the possession of the truth and of His religion, as the means to salvation, behold these messengers of Satan telling us that all other religions are equally good with that for which Christ shed His Blood on the Cross. What perverseness, what wickedness! The very thought of such blasphemy is horrible. It is denying the divinity of Christ; it is asserting that He was in error and taught what was false.

Be upon your guard, my brethren, against the error of indifferentism; it leads to loss of faith, to the denial even of the existence of God, and, finally, to despair. Banish from you the helpers of Satan, who teach these false doctrines: they seek to deprive you of the true religion in which, through the mercy of

God, you were born, and to drag you with themselves into the abyss of destruction. Adhere to the faith of Jesus Christ which the Catholic Church teaches in His name, for it is the only true religion, the religion revealed by God, and the only one pleasing to Him, hence the only one wherein there is salvation..

Remember that there can be only one truth, because there is only one God, and only one true religion, the religion taught by the Roman Catholic Church. Amen.

IX. The Fear of God

The Son of God became man to save sinners and to offer them eternal happiness. He has pointed out to us the path that leads to eternal happiness. It is the path of humility. Those who trust in their own strength, who are governed by their pride, compel God, as it were, to humble them and to resist their arrogance, while he who humbles himself before his Creator will find grace, blessing and salvation. The source of the indispensable virtue of humility is, as St. Thomas tells us, the fear of God. The fear of God preserves our hearts from falling into the vice of pride. It follows that our salvation depends on the fear of God.

God wills that all men should see in Him not only the best of Fathers, but also the supreme and absolute Lord of the universe. If, therefore, we owe to Him, as to our father, veneration and love, it would be wrong and audacious to refuse to Him, as to our supreme Lord, a proper deference and fear. Hence, the sinner cannot acquire, nor can the just man preserve, the grace of God without a holy fear of His Creator and Lord. All of us without exception, according to the testimony of the Apostle (Phil. ii, 12) must walk the path to heaven guided by a holy fear of God.

This holy fear is, according to St. Thomas, of a threefold nature. We may fear God on account of the punishment which He holds in readiness for those who offend Him. This is a servile fear. Again, we may become fearful at the enormity of sin as an offence against God, and in consequence of this fear shun sin, and this is a filial fear. Again, we may fear both the punishment and the malice of sin. Servile fear alone does not prevent sin if the desire to sin with

impunity is prevailing. If, however, servile fear precludes an attachment to sin, and is joined to confidence in the divine mercy for past and repented sins, it is a gift of heaven, and the work of the Holy Spirit, who impels the sinner to abhor the errors of his life, and enables him, through the Sacrament of Penance, to attain divine grace, as the Church has solemnly declared at the Council of Trent.

Servile fear is called by the Royal Prophet the beginning of wisdom. The Venerable Bede explains this by saying that if man after sinning begins to realize his offence, he becomes afraid of being chastised by divine justice. If the sinner, then, has sought and received forgiveness, and love has been instilled in his heart, servile fear disappears, and in its place the holy filial fear enters the heart. And the more a man grows in holiness, though the effects of divine grace, the more he loves the Father of Mercies, the more he will fear to offend Him, even in the smallest things.

Hence, the fear of God is needful for man in order to rescue him from sin.

The fear of God is necessary for the just in order to preserve him in grace, and to serve as a weapon against temptation. St. Gregory observes that though the saints were strengthened by hope, yet they had the fear of falling at the onslaughts of the tempter.

The Apostle exhorts us not to receive the grace of God in vain. There is always reason to fear that we are negligent in corresponding, by good works, to the graces received. Jesus declared that from them to whom much has been given much will be demanded (Luke xii, 48). And so we must fear that we do not employ the necessary care and zeal in corresponding with divine grace (Serm. liv, in Cant.). It happens that those who suppose themselves secure fall in punishment for their presumption. The Apostle warns: "There-

fore let him that thinketh himself to stand, take heed lest he fall" (I. Cor. x, 12).

The Lord is so well pleased to see this fear, and to see the desire to obey and remain faithful to Him, that He takes special delight in encouraging and fortifying those who are filled with this holy fear. He permits them to taste the inexpressible sweetness of divine consolation. King David says: "O how great is the multitude of thy sweetness, O Lord, which thou hast hidden for them that fear thee" (Ps. xxx, 20).

In their fear of God the courage and strength of the just is upheld by hope. They have confidence that God, who in His infinite goodness has called them to the path of salvation, will vouchsafe in His mercy to help them accomplish the work of their sanctification. They have confidence that He will be ever at their side to support them; that He will never permit them to be tempted above their strength, and that He will grant them victory in the combat. Thus the soul of the servant of God, refreshed by hope and holy charity, dwells in divine peace. In all troubles and trials the just fear not, nothing can separate them from God whom they fervently love, and, therefore, fear.

Let us, dear Christians, learn to fear God for our own advantage. Let us belong to those of whom the Psalmist says: "They tremble and shake, where it is foolish to fear" (Ps. xiii, 5). Fear not the censure of the world, be not cast down by disappointment in temporal affairs; be not vexed if things go contrary to your desires; be not afraid even of death. Leave the care of all these things to God: our fate is in His hands; He has undertaken the charge of it (Matt. vi, 25). Fear God, and all anxiety about temporal things will be unnecessary. If your conscience reproaches you with grievous sin, if you have reason to fear the severity of the justice of God, then

awaken within you a sincere contrition and have recourse to the Holy Sacraments. If your passions incite you to sin, think with fear of the punishment that threatens you, and of the abomination of iniquity in the eyes of the Almighty. And even when you are firmly determined not to relapse again into sin, it is still your duty to fear the temptations of your enemy, and to fear the displeasure of God, if you fail to correspond to His graces with due endeavor. The Lord abandons those only who wilfully turn away from Him. You will feel how the fire of divine love and the desire to remain faithful to God will increase in your heart. In this way the servile fear will prepare the way for a holy fear of God, and you will attain the crown of triumph which the loving Creator has prepared for those who love and fear Him. Amen.

X. On Death

God, who has created us after His own image and likeness (Gen. i, 26), and who has destined us to behold Him eternally in His glory (I. Tim. xi, 4), continually reminds us that this earth is not our home but a place of exile, and that one day we shall die and leave it. He admonishes us that, according to the flesh, we were called forth from dust, and to dust shall return. He warns us, in Holy Scripture, under various symbols, that our bodies are perishable. He compares us to a flower which fades, to a river that rushes on (2d), to a shadow that vanishes (Matt. xxiv, 27). Our Lord, when He descended upon earth, in order to efface the sins of mankind with His Precious Blood, dwelt impressively on the uncertainty of the moment when death will overtake us, and on the necessity of being prepared.

With the certainty of death demonstrated in daily life, the shortsightedness of so many men who live their lives as if they were never to die, and never had to appear before the terrible judgment of God, is truly astonishing. There are three important truths which I wish to impress upon you to-day, namely, that we may die at any moment, that we shall die but once, and that we shall be lost forever if we die in sin.

God forsaw that earthly things would exercise a great power over men. For this reason He reminds us incessantly that we must one day leave these things, and often at a time when we least expect it.

He warns the sensual man who gives himself to a life of vice; the slanderer, who shatters the good name and reputation of his neigh-

bor; the revengeful; the miser; the indifferent and impious idler, that they will one day die and be called to judgment.

Many men delay conversion, hoping that their end is far off. If they thought themselves in immediate danger of passing into eternity their way of living would suffer a radical change. They are enjoying perfect health, are perhaps in the bloom of youth, and hope to live many years. But do we not see every day that people in seemingly perfect health are suddenly overtaken by death?

Death, my dear brethren, holds his arrow in readiness at all hours, and he is certain to strike sooner or later. In peaceful sleep, in the midst of enjoyment, without the slightest warning, at the very moment perhaps when men are offending God, death overtakes them, and decides their lot irrevocably for all eternity. Some of us, now assembled here, will be taken off by death within a year, yea, within a few months, and who of us is certain of even another month in this life?

This is an important truth: that we may die at any moment; but there is another no less serious, namely, that we shall die but once. Upon the moment in which our soul separates from our body depends an eternity. With death begins for each soul an irrevocable hereafter. And this extremely important moment will come but once, and never again.

But, alas, although we know that man must die, and will die but once, and that death is the end of our life and the entrance into eternity, what preparation do we make for a change which filled even the saints with fear and awe? A death in sin and impenitence is inevitably followed by eternal damnation. As the tree happens to fall when struck down, so it will lie.

For the unfortunate soul who, dazzled by momentary pleasure, has renounced the heritage of the elect, death has in store an existence of

never-ending torture. It will be severely punished for the sinful pleasure which it loved so much, and shut out of the heavenly paradise that it did not seek. It will lament and weep, but without hope. Oh, take now to heart, at the thought of death, the admonition of the Lord to amend your life. The art of dying well can only be acquired through the practise of living well. The thought of your last end will prove salutary to you now, and if, in your last hour, the thought of death will inspire you only with dread of the Divine justice, the thought of death during your life will inspire you with confidence in the Divine mercy.

Is it possible, indeed, that you can live peacefully in a condition in which you surely would not wish to die? If convinced that death is unavoidable, that the hour is uncertain, and that man dies but once, how can you burden your conscience with sins, to gain an imaginary and fleeting pleasure which will be punished after death in eternal torment? Providence has wisely kept that last moment hidden from mankind, so that men in the fear of death may diligently work their salvation.

In considering the fact that the hour of our death is uncertain, let us observe the difference between dying suddenly and dying unexpectedly. Sudden death may sometimes be the fate of the just. But as their lives are a constant preparation for death they die, if suddenly, still not unexpectedly. Unexpected death is the result of culpable negligence on the part of man. Although faith, reason, and experience tell him that death constantly lays in wait for him, and will surely overtake him, yet he does not think of preparing himself for death.

I will not attempt to frighten you by picturing a sudden end such as has overtaken many men in sin. Let us suppose that you will die after a protracted illness has made you think seriously and frequently

of death. If the thought of death does not rouse such a sick person from the stupor of sin, then death will surprise him in spite of the long sickness. The patient knows that death is approaching yet postpones his conversion so long until all at once a fatal turn takes place and he dies unexpectedly, without making his peace with God. "The Lord will expose to destruction those who do not heed and obey His loving call to grace" (Prov. i, 24).

If you properly realize the fact that you may die at any moment, that you will die but once, and that those who persevere in sin will be surprised by death, you will not continue to be your own enemy to the extent of inviting your own destruction. Should there be any one amongst you who believes he can safely delay his conversion until the last moment, let me warn him with the words of St. Jerome, who says that amongst a hundred thousand hardened sinners there is hardly one who will make his peace with God at the moment of death. (Epist. ad Dam. T., 9.) If we possess the fear of God and duly prepare ourselves for a good death our end will be peaceful and blessed; but if we live in sin and never think of death our end will be a sad and terrible one. The choice rests with us. Amen.

XI. The Holy Name of Jesus

At the circumcision of our Lord He was given the name of Jesus, which, in our language, signifies Redeemer and Saviour. The holiness and sublimity of this adorable name we will make the subject of our contemplation to-day, the feast of the Holy Name.

Since Jesus Christ was not man only, but also the Son of God, men could not have given Him a name that would suit the Majesty of His Person. Hence, the Eternal Father Himself revealed the name for His Infinite Son. It was announced to both Mary and Joseph that our Lord was to be called Jesus.

The Prophet Isaias had spoken of the Redeemer by foretelling that He would be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the World to Come, the Prince of Peace (Is. ix, 6). All these glorious titles are contained in the Holy Name Jesus. As He was the Redeemer, to Him belonged the Name Mighty because He was to accomplish the salvation of mankind. He was to vanquish Satan and his court. To Him belonged the Name of God, and He is indeed the Counsellor because His doctrine is replete with true heavenly advice. He is the Prince of Peace because He has reconciled us with God and granted us the fulness of the peace of heaven.

We read in the secret revelation that the Holy Spirit will reward the noble combatants, who fight valiantly for heaven, by the gift of a precious stone in which is graven a new name which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it (Apoc. ii, 17). It was befitting, therefore, that the vanquisher of death and of sin should have a name, the sublimity and prerogatives of which would only be comprehended by the Divine intelligence of Him who gave it; and this was

the most Holy Name of Jesus, which, as St. Paul says, cannot even be uttered worthily by men without the assistance of the Holy Spirit (I. Cor. xii, 3).

Oh, that Christians might invoke this Holy Name frequently and with befitting reverence, and partake of the abundance of heavenly benedictions that would descend upon them in this Name. Holy Scripture likens it to oil which, poured out, spreads in all directions (Cant. i, 2). Oil is possessed of three chief peculiarities to which the most holy Name of Jesus bears a mysterious likeness, as St. Bernard observes, namely, it illumines, nourishes, and heals. The Holy Name may, in these properties, be compared to oil. The world, lost in the darkness of sin and ignorance, has since the proclaiming of this miraculous Name been shining in the light of faith. In this Name God has called us to the radiance of that light of which the Apostle says: "For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord" (Ephes. v, 8). This is the Name that Paul proclaimed before kings, before the heathen, and the people of Israel, and he cried out: "The night is passed, and the day is at hand. Let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day" (Rom. xiii, 12). The potency of this Holy Name spreads not alone over the earth but also over heaven, even to the limits of hell, as the Apostle assures us when he says, that at the adorable name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth and in hell" (Phil. xi, 2).

Countless were the miracles worked by the Apostles by virtue of this Holy Name. The Acts of the Apostles tell us how they raised the dead in this Name, how they put evil spirits to flight, broke chains, and deprived snakes of their poison.

Man, furthermore, finds in the Divine Name a spiritual food, and a means of salvation—soothing balm for all his sufferings and in-

firmities, for it is a guide-post to heaven, a help in temporal matters, a weapon and shield against the assaults of hell. Our weakness renders us incapable of even lifting our gaze up to heaven without the help of Divine Grace, which is given us through the superabundant merits of the Redeemer. Hence, it is His Name that must serve as our guide upon the path of salvation: "For there is no other Name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv, 12), and the Church addresses all her prayers to the Eternal Father in the Name, and through the Mediation, of Jesus Christ.

The sufferings and trials of this life are many. A trustful recourse to the strength of this Divine Name will allay the storm and fill our soul with confidence and hope so that we may say with the Prophet: "I will rejoice in the Lord: and I will joy in the Lord my Jesus" (Hab. iii, 18).

The Son of God through His redeeming death has completely bound and conquered Satan, so that without our consent he is unable to harm us. There is no better shield and protection against the temptations and suggestions of the evil spirit than the invocation of this Divine Name. We put the devil to flight if, with a lively faith and devotion, we utter the most Holy Name of Jesus.

We see, therefore, that the Name of Jesus is the most exalted of all names, and that through it we receive every blessing. If we are ignorant we shall find in it true wisdom, if sick, we shall find health; if poor, a treasure that will not rust; if hungry, our food; if weak, power and strength; if sinful, sanctification, so that we can truly say that Jesus will be all in all to us. Let us call upon Him in all our needs, particularly when the dread moment of death is approaching, in the consoling assurance that with the aid of this Name we shall escape the snares of Satan, and reach the harbor of eternal salvation. Amen.

XII. The General Judgment

There are three divine functions ascribed to Jesus Christ: that of Redeemer, of Mediator, and of Judge. The last office the Lord will exercise in an especial manner at the end of time, when He will visibly descend from heaven in order to judge all mankind. This second appearance of Jesus Christ upon earth will be quite different from His first. He will not come then with compassion, in order to redeem us, but as the Supreme Judge of the living and the dead, of just and sinner. He will not come as the humble Babe of Bethlehem, not as the meek and crucified Son of Man, but in glory and majesty, surrounded by the splendor of His power. This truth affords a subject for profound meditation.

In His inscrutable wisdom Jesus Christ has willed not to make known the time and the hour when He will come to hold that awful judgment. Yet He has announced some extraordinary events and signs which will herald that day of days, and which will warn us of its proximity.

Among these signs are:

1. The general corruption of nations, and the abandonment of mankind to vice and crime to such an extent that few true worshipers of God will remain.

2. A disastrous visitation of plagues of all kinds, of pestilence and famine, of war, earthquake, and inundations.

3. Ungodly men and false prophets in great numbers will arise to lead the world astray; they will assume the name and title of God's emissaries.

4. The re-appearance on earth of the Prophets Enoch and Elias and the preaching of the gospel all over the world.

5. The conversion of the Jews to the faith of Jesus Christ. "When you shall see these things come to pass," said Jesus to His disciples, "know that the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Luke xxi, 31).

The immediate precursor of the advent of the divine Judge will be a general confusion of the laws of nature: the sun will be obscured, the moon will lose its radiance, the stars will leave their course; finally, a river of fire will belch forth to consume everything upon earth. In this awful devastation all men then still living will perish.

The angel's trumpet will recall all the dead to life and assemble them in the Valley of Josaphat. Heaven will open, and, surrounded with splendor, Jesus Christ will appear, accompanied by legions of angels, to judge all mankind.

In this judgment the lives of all men, without exception, will be searched by the bright rays of God's countenance, their deeds will be revealed before the eyes of the whole world, and judged by divine law and justice. Every human act will be subjected to strict investigation. What a multitude of virtues and good works, what myriads of sin of all kinds will there be revealed! Ungodly works and discourses, bad intentions, evil desires, shameful vices, scandal, neglect of duty, misuse of the graces and gifts of God, non-correspondence with His inspirations, even sin committed in apparently doing good works but with perverted intentions.

To the human understanding it does not seem possible to conduct so exhaustive an investigation into the life of every individual that ever lived upon earth. But the almighty Judge will radiate so bright and searching a light that the virtues of the just, and the vices

of the sinner, will appear plain and evident to all, and a complete and irresistible conviction will at once take place. Oh, what will be the shame and the confusion of the reprobate when they behold themselves and their hideous deeds unmasked and exposed before the whole world!

After laying bare all consciences, the judgment will be terminated by a twofold sentence; it will be eternal blessing for the just, and eternal damnation for the wicked, the one like the other to take effect immediately. The just, radiant with joy and happiness, will ascend to heaven, nevermore to leave it; the damned will be cast into hell, in horrible despair, to remain there in torments for all eternity.

But to what purpose, you may ask, is this general judgment needed at the end of the world since man is judged directly after death, and his lot decided for all eternity?

The general judgment will take place, first, that Jesus Christ, in presence of the assembled world, may reveal His Supreme Sovereignty, that He may be acknowledged before heaven and earth as the Supreme Judge of the living and the dead: and that all may be witnesses of His exaltation, of His triumph and glorification consequent upon the ignominy He endured upon earth.

Secondly, that the justice of the particular judgment passed upon every individual may be evident to all, and that by the general judgment Christ may prove the truth of His Gospel, as well, as the malice and errors of those who opposed His teaching.

Thirdly, so that God may be offered the honor befitting Him and that His wise and benign Providence, now so often murmured against, may then be justified in a glorious manner. It is necessary, therefore, that God should make known to all His supreme wisdom, His justice, and the prudence of His ways, so that all may offer Him

befitting praise, and confess that He has ruled all things with wisdom, justice and love. Finally, that justice may be meted out to all. There are on earth many chosen souls, beloved of God, who are neither known nor appreciated by the world, who are much oftener persecuted and despised. On the other hand, hypocritical and ungodly sinners are often showered with esteem and honor. Hence, a general judgment is necessary to set right many erroneous judgments and many injustices of men: a tribunal is needed before which the whole truth will be made plain, a tribunal which on the one hand, will reveal hidden virtues and bestow honor where honor is due, and which, on the other hand, will tear the mask of hypocrisy from the ungodly and cover them with the ignominy and shame they have deserved.

Behold here, my dear brethren, some of the reasons why the particular and secret judgment passed upon us at our death must be followed by another, public and general judgment, at the end of the world.

If we would escape the fear and disaster of that awful day, if we would avoid eternal shame and disgrace and the everlasting curse that will fall upon the reprobate, let us now pass severe judgment upon ourselves and our sins, let us confess the latter sincerely and do penance for them. Let us earnestly resolve to lead a good life, not according to the customs, views, and opinions of the world, but according to the holy law of God, which is the sole and only rule by which we shall be judged. In this way our destiny will be made secure for us, our sins will be wiped out, and instead of shame and eternal perdition, honor and glory will be our portion, and we shall be numbered among the chosen children of God. Amen.

XIII. On Hell

It was a significant separation which the householder in the parable of the Gospel caused to be made amongst the products of his fields. The reaper cut the wheat and the cockle at the same stroke, but how different is the fate of the one from that of the other. "Gather up," says the master, "all the grain carefully into my barn for safekeeping, but bind the cockle into bundles and cast it into the fire" (Matt. xiii, 30). No more suitable parable could be given in order to put before us the terrible separation which the angels as the ministers of Jesus Christ will, at the last judgment, enforce between the just and the reprobate (*Ibid.* v, 49). The former will be called to the enjoyment of eternal glory: but how unhappy the lot of the sinful! Expelled from God's sight, burdened with His irrevocable curse, they will be cast into exerlasting fire, without any hope whatever of rescue from that torture (Matt. xxv, 46). May the Lord in His infinite mercy forbid that any one of us be sentenced to the cruel torture of those flames. St. Bernard says, that it is very profitable for man during life to descend frequently into hell in thought in order not to be cast into it after death. Let us then open the terrible prison of the damned to the eyes of our mind. We shall see that hell is the last resort and meeting-place of all evil.

Yet, how may I venture to explain to you the frightful sufferings of the damned when the saints themselves, as they pondered over them, were filled with consternation and trembling? How can I describe them, when even a St. Augustine says that no matter how we may picture them we cannot attempt to give even a slight conception of the torments and pains of hell because the latter are far

greater than our reason is capable of grasping. In order, however, to enlighten you to some extent, I will seek to describe how the punishment of the senses, and the pain of loss (of God) occasion torments without alleviation, and how these torments last without interruption and without end.

Let us, then, descend in thought into the infernal regions, into the dark and hideous dungeon, the pool of iniquity, as the Holy Spirit calls it (Matt. xxiii, 33), the lake of divine wrath, the sea of fire and brimstone, the place of lamentation and darkness, the place where there is nothing but everlasting horror (Job x, 22).

The damned are there confined in a fire that burns unceasingly (Matt. xxv). Just imagine that someone were cast into a furnace, or into a large vat of burning sulphur, or of molten metal, and that he could live and experience, even only for a day, how the fire burns into flesh, bones and nerves, how it penetrates his body, this unfortunate man would endure unspeakable agony and pain, of which the mere thought fills us with horror. Who, then, may describe or ever comprehend, the agony and ordeal which the damned suffer in hell, where they are immersed for all eternity in a sea of fire and flames. How useless to attempt an adequate description of their agonies and torments.

If hell fire were like earthly fire it would surely be a great torment to burn therein, but hell fire is very different from ours. In order to realize this difference somewhat, it suffices to reflect that our earthly fire was created by God for our use, for our convenience, while hell, on the contrary, is expressly designed by divine justice to punish. The Holy Fathers of the Church unanimously declare that our fire as compared to hell fire is as a shadow to the reality. Now if even our fire is so painful in its burning, what must the fire of hell be?

But the damned not only burn in the awful fire, not only do they suffer the pains of burning, they endure other kinds of agony, other kinds of torments and tortures. Our weak powers of understanding cannot grasp the full horrors of the place which Holy Scripture describes as a place of torments.

And yet, in addition to the punishment of the senses, the damned have still another punishment to undergo—the punishment of loss, of the loss of God and of heaven, which punishment is the severest of all, and surpasses all others in degree and intensity.

And when will God cease to hurl the lightning of His wrath against the damned? When the number of centuries will equal that of the stars in heaven, of the grains of the sand in the sea, the damned will still be only beginning their torments. No matter what their sufferings, they will never be capable of wiping out their sins and abominations. And as their sins cannot be effaced, the justice of God must punish them as long as He is God, and as He can never cease to be God, so hell must last forever, and the damned can never, never leave hell. Never! how terrible the word!

Some men suffer heavy blows of fate, yet the thought that the day must come which will see the end of all suffering affords some alleviation. How terrible, however, must the pains of hell become through the absolute certainty that they never, never, will come to an end, that they will last forever and forever. What more can I say? Think of hell often, my dear brethren, and the thought will preserve you from such an awful eternity.

Is it possible, indeed, that with the threat of hell in mind any one would dare to continue a life of sin and remain in danger of being cast into hell, without any hope of rescue?

Every one of us must apply this thought to himself. It is *I*, we all must say to ourselves, who will be cast into hell, to suffer therein for

all eternity, if I do not live as a true servant of God. *I* shall be cast into the everlasting flames if I do not do penance for my sins, if I do not begin to lead a truly Christian, pious and God-fearing life.

May God forbid that, with this terrible warning before our minds, we may swerve from the path of righteousness and incur the eternal torments of hell. May the Lord preserve us all from such a terrible fate. Amen.

XIV. Heaven

If even a feeble glimpse of the eternal glory of God, as it manifested itself at the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, appeared so enchanting to Peter, that he at once would give up the world and live forever upon that hallowed mountain, what bliss must it be to behold the full splendor of heaven, to realize its full meaning, to taste its delights, to possess its bliss without fear of ever losing it again. St. Paul assures us that eye hath not seen, neither hath the ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love Him. It is not my intention to describe to you heaven in all its splendor, for it would be impossible for me to do so. In attempting to picture to you the blissful abode of the elect, my words will be quite insufficient to do justice to my subject. I can depict but a feeble image of it, and you must draw your own conclusions as to the immensity and nature of heaven. Suffice it to say, that it is the truest good, the supreme and greatest of all good, because the glory of heaven consists chiefly in beholding God, in loving and praising Him.

The perfect happiness of the soul, so says St. Augustine, consists in possessing the fulness of its proper desire. This possession engenders peace and satisfaction. In this world we can never be really happy, because either we do not have what we desire, or because we do not desire that which we should desire. As long as we remain in this place of exile, visible creation cannot conduce to our permanent happiness, or to the supreme accomplishment of our perfection; but the moment we pass across the threshold of the heavenly paradise, what blessed purity of the will, what peace to the

senses, what jubilant rapture shall we experience! When our intelligence has been enabled to understand the divine mysteries, it will realize how the three Persons constitute the Most Holy Trinity: how the Father generated the Son, without being greater than the Son; how the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son, without being inferior to them in any sense. It will see the marvelous union of the Divine and human natures in the one Divine Person of Jesus Christ.

The blessed soul will behold in God infinite goodness and beauty, which will fill the soul with infinite delight, admiration, rapture and love.

Oh, sweet rapture of a blessed, God-loving soul! This soul loves in supreme happiness, with the most ardent love that will ever continue, for by losing all thought of itself it knows of nothing further to desire, nothing to wish, can think of no other good except the One it loves. It loves, but with a perfectly blissful love, because it finds every gratification in the one supreme Good whom it loves. This love, says St. Augustine, is the only air which those inexpressibly blessed souls breathe, the sole substance of their existence. And who could describe it!

When the soul enters paradise it will exclaim: My faith taught that the joys of heaven would be full and complete. But, oh, rapture, my expectation could picture only a feeble image, a shadow, of that which I here in reality see and possess! Blessed be those sufferings endured upon earth in resignation to the Divine will! Hallowed be that labor, those penitential works! Blessed in particular be my most gracious God who purchased this glory for me at the price of His passion, who assisted me with His powerful grace, guided my actions, and granted to my good works their merit!

And this infinite and never-ending bliss is offered to all of us. Yes,

dear Christians, you and I can, and should, gain heaven. All that is required is the fulfilling of the conditions under which God has promised it to us. It suffices on our part that we seek it earnestly, that we desire it. It is the reward of the work, the price and the crown of the righteousness, the recompense of the combat.

And now let us consider what we are really doing to merit such a magnificent reward. Alas, the lives of many Christians are little in accord with the law of God. Small are their efforts to attain the crown of the righteous, the salvation for which they were created. Does it not seem that some Christians seem more anxious to damn than to save their souls? Yes, indeed, it is only too true that many Christians live only for the world; they hanker after everything worldly, and think little, if at all, about heaven and eternal glory.

Dear brethren, think seriously upon this: Heaven is the greatest of all good; but man cannot attain it without working for it. Contemplate the awful words of Jesus Christ: Many are called, but few are chosen. Go to work at once, and earnestly, so that you may be counted amongst the fortunate number of the chosen ones, and merit the glory of heaven by living a righteous and God-fearing life. **Amen.**

XV. Purgatory

According to the teaching of our faith, there is in the hereafter a place where souls pay the last farthing of the penalty due their former sins and are purged from the guilt of unforgiven venial sin.

In our present instruction on purgatory we shall consider the truth of the existence of a purgatory, and also the severity of the punishment inflicted there.

The fact that prayers and alms have, since the earliest times, been offered up for departed souls, proves that belief in the existence of a purgatory has at all times prevailed. For it stands to reason that the souls in heaven require no prayer and assistance, and the damned in hell cannot be assisted.

Already the Jewish people were convinced of this truth. We read, for instance, in the Second Book of Machabees, that Judas Machabeus, desiring to relieve the soldiers of his army who had fallen in battle, commanded his people to pray for them: and Holy Scripture commends this action with the words: "It is, therefore, a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins."

Jesus Christ speaks in the Gospel of a prison in which the debtor will be cast who does not settle with his creditor, namely, with Divine justice, and He adds that there will be no escape from the prison until the last farthing of his debt is paid. This prison, whence there is no deliverance until complete satisfaction has been made to Divine justice, can only be purgatory. St. Paul teaches the same truth when he says that those who do good words, but from negligence or lack of the proper intention perform them imper-

fectly, will indeed be saved, but only after previously passing through a cleansing fire. Hence, it follows that there is a fire in which the souls are purified after death. Finally, the Church, at the Council of Trent, has threatened with excommunication all those who hold the contrary. Since God has proclaimed it, and the infallible Church presents it to us as a truth for our belief, there can be no doubt about purgatory in the Christian's mind. Reason confirms this truth. It cannot be questioned that venial sin, though staining the purity of the soul, yet does not deprive the soul of its spiritual life of sanctifying grace. A soul thus slightly burdened does not deserve hell, but neither can it be received into heaven where nothing defiled may enter. There must, therefore, be an intermediate place where the souls of the just, by transitory suffering, purify themselves.

Having satisfied ourselves of the truth of the existence of purgatory, let us now descend in spirit into that place and contemplate the penalty which it inflicts.

The torments of purgatory are in their degree so severe that, according to the assurances of the holy fathers and theologians, even the least punishment in that place surpasses anything that we can suffer in this world. Even the soul that suffers least in purgatory endures more than the acutest sufferings on earth. The pains of purgatory surpass anything that the rage of the most cruel tyrant could invent; they surpass all the tortures ever inflicted upon the martyrs by their bloodthirsty persecutors.

The fire which cleanses those holy souls is incomparably severer than that which serves for our use, although even the latter can cause the most acute sufferings. The fire of the place of purification is kindled by Divine justice, and takes its strength from His omnipotence, otherwise it would be incapable of making any impression

upon souls. Some of the holy fathers share the opinion of St. Augustine, that the fire of this place of purification is of the same nature as that of hell.

In addition to the punishment of the senses, far surpassing our conception, there is in purgatory, as there is in hell, also the punishment of loss, which consists in exclusion from the vision of God. The holy souls in purgatory perceive and understand that they were created for God. Separated from their bodies they feel themselves drawn toward God as to their last end, and they desire accordingly to possess Him, and this desire is the more intense the more fervently they love God. Separation from Him is for them a torture, which causes them even more suffering than the pain of the fire which burns them so severely.

The unhappy souls sigh for the moment when they shall be united to the object of all their desires. They sigh and languish for the moment when they will be able to enter the peace and delight of the vision of God. Impelled by the most fervent longing, their ceaseless efforts are directed towards the blessed abode of heaven. And the more they desire to soar up to the exalted heights of heaven, the more sensible are they of the retribution of Divine justice, which retains them in the depths of their prison.

Nevertheless, these holy souls, inflamed as they are with the fervent love of God, are in their sufferings wholly resigned to the exalted dispensation of the Divine will. Acknowledging His justice, they praise the hand which chastens them, and, instead of complaining, they repeat unceasingly with David: "Thou art just, O Lord: and thy judgment is right." They realize, nevertheless, that their friends and relations on earth can hasten the end of their sufferings. So they throw themselves upon the charitableness of their friends. We can help them in many ways: by fasting, almsgiving or other

sacrifice; by hearing Mass, saying the Rosary, by gaining indulgences, etc.

Every one of us is capable of going to their assistance, but alas, very few fulfil this obligation of charity. And for this reason these poor souls cry out: "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you, my friends; because the hand of the Lord hath touched me."

A time will come, and perhaps sooner than you suppose, when you will be expecting this assistance from others. Then the Lord may permit that it will be done to you as you did to others. With the same measure it may be meted out to you, as you measured unto others. Give and it shall be given to you. Help the poor souls now and they will procure assistance for you in the time of your need.

XVI. Prayer

In punishment for the disobedience of our first parents, the evils in this world have become so numerous that, as pious Job rightly exclaimed, our short life is completely filled with afflictions and misery. And finally death claims us all, rich and poor.

The afflictions of life would be unbearable but for the mercy of God. The Incarnate Son of the eternal God promised that we would obtain all things from the Father for which we asked in His name. The Most High is ever ready to listen to those who turn to Him for help, and they alone have no share in the treasures of His goodness who neglect or refuse to ask for them. Prayer has sufficient efficacy to deliver us from every evil and to obtain for us every good. It is of marvelous power, provided we use it in the proper way.

The Lord desires to communicate His gifts to us, and to come to our assistance in our numerous needs. Hence, He bids us to take refuge with Him. He even commands that we should pray to Him without ceasing, and He is displeased if we neglect to do so. Without the assistance of devout and constant prayer it is impossible to preserve a living faith, to lead a virtuous life, and, finally, to attain eternal glory. Satan knows this well, and he seeks, with great ardor, to keep us from the exercise of prayer that would render us invincible to his attacks.

Prayer is an invincible shield, an inexhaustible treasure, a harbor offering protection against every storm, a peaceful retreat in the midst of the combat, the source and root of all good. It not only renders us like unto the angels, no, its power is so great even, that it overcomes, as it were, the Divine will. We read in Holy Scripture

how Patriarch Jacob approached the Most High, and detained Him, as it were, in a contest of prayer until he had received from Him the desired blessing. The prayer of Moses stayed the hand of the Lord, threatening to hurl the lightning of His wrath against the faithless people of Israel. Hence, St. Chrysostom declares that there is no greater power than the prayer of the just man.

Innumerable are the miracles that were wrought though prayer. Victory over mighty armies, mastering of conflagrations, conquest of wild beasts, driving out of devils, raising from the dead, stamping out of epidemics, healing of the sick, calming of storms; they all, according to Holy Writ, are effected by prayer, in confirmation of the promise of the Holy Spirit, that the prayer of the just man shall pierce the clouds and will not depart from the throne of God, till the Most High beholds it with the eyes of love and favor.

It must be remembered, however, that so wonderful a power dwells not in every prayer, but only in the prayer of the just man. He has, as St. James tells us, the power to open and shut the heavens at will; but the prayer which proceeds from a heart defiled, and from unclean lips, is ineffective, for we cannot expect to obtain from the Lord that which we wish if, on our part, we refuse to do what He asks of us.

Hence, Holy Scripture admonishes us to prepare our conscience and purify our heart before we betake ourselves to prayer. We must purify our hearts from unbecoming and sinful thought; we must remember that we are miserable creatures, deserving of punishment and in need of mercy and grace, that we are unworthy to speak to God, in whose presence even angels tremble and the seraphim veil their faces. We should be unworthy of so great an honor if God did not, in His great love, even command us to appear before Him and present to Him our petitions.

Meanwhile, the truth remains, that if the sinner detest his impiety and form the firm resolution to offend God no more, his prayer becomes pleasing to God. We know that the publican, who humbly implored mercy, left the Temple justified, and the repentant thief, who invoked the Lord's aid upon the Cross, obtained the promise of Paradise.

Now, although a prayer said with a lively faith and a pure heart is always pleasing to the Lord, and draws down upon us the graces and gifts of heaven, yet the prayers said by the faithful in common are even more agreeable to God, and more efficacious in attaining their object. The prayers of the less perfect gain more weight, and the Lord cannot resist the urging of a great number of His servants, who, as with one tongue and one heart, in a loud voice implore His aid.

Hence, dear brethren, it will be most beneficial to you, and peace and unity will settle in your homes, if you assist frequently and with diligence at the public services of the Church, and if you also spend some time in united devotion with the members of the family at home, imploring God's gifts and graces. What a good example it will be for your children! What a consolation in all your cares and worries!

Dear brethren, you find time for many other things and you will find time for the necessary prayers if the good will is there. And, occasionally, should time for long prayer be lacking, a short prayer, a fervent and devout ejaculation, will be pleasing and acceptable to God.

Now I wish to say a word to those who lament that they do not obtain from God what they pray for, despite their perseverance in prayer. There are reasonable explanations for such a condition of things. It may be that you do not pray as you should. And even if

you pray in the right way, you may not obtain what you pray for because the granting of the petition would be to your injury. It is an act of Divine mercy in such instances to refuse your request. Does a father love his children, may I ask, who blindly grants their request even if they ask for things injurious to them? Certainly not; you would rather have your children discontented than cause them injury. The physician may refuse the patient permission to leave his bed, to partake of certain foods, although the patient craves such favors and is much displeased if they are refused. And thus the Lord declines to hear the prayers of the just when He knows that the object desired would be to their disadvantage and injury.

Our wishes and petitions must always be directed to the glory of God, and to the salvation of our souls. When you pray in the right way, be firmly convinced that God in His mercy will hear you. As regards the means of livelihood, health, fortune, and all other temporal affairs, you may pray for them, but always with the restriction that your petition be pleasing to God and profitable to your soul.

Let not a day pass by in which you do not converse with God in prayer, because without prayer it is impossible for you to lead a Christian life and be saved. Pray with a lively faith and a pure heart; pray in common with others, and your prayers will be pleasing to God. Jesus Christ has enjoined us to pray. He has exhorted us to seek and to knock, with the assurance that we shall receive and find, and that the door of grace shall be open unto us. Amen.

XVII. Fasting and Abstinence

Both as Christians and as sinful men we are obliged to do penance. Having been created by the hand of a just and good God, we do not find happiness upon earth because we have sinned and are deserving of divine punishment. We are disciples of the God-man, who was our model and whose whole life was one of continued suffering, for the expiation of our sins.

It is He who addresses the earnest words to us: "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish." The Redeemer has commissioned His Church to guide us in the fulfilling of His holy law, and, faithful to her mission, she has instituted the precepts of fasting and abstinence.

Yet, it must be admitted that there is no commandment more transgressed and ignored by Christians than this one. Many Christians ignore the days of fast. They act as if this commandment was not binding, but rather a matter of counsel. Let us examine the reasons advanced by many Christians for transgressing so important a commandment.

Of the two chief excuses for the violation of the commandment of fasting and abstinence, one has reference to the authority of the one commanding, the other refers to the matter enjoined. Some claim that this is not a law of God, but that it is the Church who imposes fasting and abstinence upon us. They ignore the fact that the commandment of the Church is based upon the Divine commandment of mortification and penance, a commandment impressed by Jesus Christ upon all mankind as a condition of salvation. His words are distinct and precise: "Unless you do penance, you shall

all likewise perish." It is the task of the Church to provide for the particular application of this general commandment and she discharges this solemn duty by regulating the time, the way and the manner of doing penance. The Gospel commands penance, and the Church puts the commandment in practise by ordering on certain days fasting and abstinence. This commandment is, therefore, a Divine rather than a Church law. It is even a law of nature, for nature and common sense teach us that fasting not only is a useful, but even a necessary means to weaken the passions, to give greater strength to the mind, to prepare the soul for contrition and preserve it in virtue. And for these reasons fasting has been practised at all times.

But even supposing that the commandment of fasting and abstinence is only a law of the Church: is it for such reason less binding? Has not the Church authority to command and impose a strict obligation? The Church was instituted by Jesus Christ in order to guide us to eternal salvation. She received authority from Jesus Christ to order that which she considers necessary or advisable for the interest of the faithful. God has imposed upon us the duty of obedience to the Church. Disobedience to her is disobedience to God; resistance to her is rebellion against God. "He that heareth you," said the Lord to His Apostles, "heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me." A transgression of the laws of the Church is, therefore, grievous disobedience and grave offence against God.

Again, there are Christians who say, if we lead a life free from vices God will not condemn us for not abstaining from certain foods.

The Church does not prohibit these special foods, at certain times, because they are of themselves sinful; she does so only for the purpose of imposing upon us mortification, sacrifice, and it is not the

enjoyment of these foods that makes you culpable before God and defiles your soul, it is your craving for the forbidden, your disobedience, your voluntary transgression of the commandment of holy Church, which incurs God's displeasure and punishment.

It is not of moment to know whether that which is prohibited is wholesome or bad, the chief consideration is that it is forbidden, forbidden by one who has the right and the authority to prohibit. True, all foods were created by God for our wants, yet, nevertheless, He has not renounced the right to forbid one or the other according to time and circumstances. In proof of this we know that the Lord, in the time of Moses, prescribed fasting and abstinence for the people of Israel. Indeed, the very first commandment ever given to mankind, to our first parents, was a commandment of abstinence. The fruit forbidden in Paradise was not unwholesome of its kind, yet the transgression of this prohibition was a grievous sin, and you know the fatal consequences which it brought upon the culprits and their descendants. God is ever Lord and Master, when He forbids Cain to shed innocent blood and no less when He commands Adam not to eat the fruit of a tree. The authority of God has been bestowed upon the Church; she is endowed with Divine sovereignty and the right to command and to prohibit.

If possessed of the true penitential spirit we shall ever be mindful of this law of the Church. If real necessity, infirmity for instance, releases us from its observance, we must not neglect, as far as possible, to make satisfaction to God in some other way. In order that this penitential spirit may never fail us, let us keep in mind the sins which we committed. The penance imposed by the laws of the Church does not equal the debt which we have incurred towards God, and bears no proportion to the multitude and enormity of our offences. Our trespasses must of necessity be expiated by

ourselves, here or hereafter. What folly to disregard the opportunity for expiation by the trifling penance which the Church imposes!

Let us reflect that we do not find it difficult to submit willingly to much stricter fasts and more trying abstinences if the welfare of our body requires it. We cheerfully indure privation if we can further our temporal welfare; how, then, can we refuse to do as much for the good of our soul? So much solicitude for the body that must die, and so little for our immortal soul!

I believe that if you duly consider these truths you will cheerfully comply with the fasts ordered by the Church even though they may occasion you some slight inconvenience. They will benefit you in your body, but especially and chiefly they will prove a blessing to your immortal soul. Amen.

XVIII. The Mercy and Justice of God

Sin is a separation of the sinner from God, a servant's desertion of his master, the son's abandonment of his loving father. When man offends the Lord by transgressing His holy law, he says with Agar: "I flee from the face of my master," with the difference, however, that Agar fled from a severe mistress; the sinner, however, flees from His most merciful and good God, upon whom he impudently turns his back. In this miserable state the sinner will walk in the wrong path, from one abyss of crime to another. His punishment is already assured; hell is ready to swallow him.

Richly has he deserved destruction, but God in His great mercy wishes to save him. The sinner can, of himself, do nothing to return to God, but God, as it were, goes after him. He follows the straying creature, He seeks him out, calls unto him, and invites him to return to His lovingly outstretched arms.

Let us to-day consider the greatness of Divine mercy, and, at the same time, give attention to the fact that only the contrite sinner may profit by this mercy, while the unrepentant sinner gains nothing, because the mercy of God is never separated from His justice.

Mercy comprises in itself, as St. Thomas remarks, two sentiments, that of sadness at the misfortune of the neighbor, and that of willingness to deliver him therefrom. God in His infinite love commissioned His only begotten Son to clothe Himself in our human nature, so that He might have compassion upon our misery, and sympathize with us. The Divine Word, however, was not content with sympathy for our ills, He wished to take upon Himself man's punishment for sin, even death, so that

the endurance of these sufferings would render Him all the more sympathetic to our misery. Hence, St. Paul writes, that Jesus Christ has an infinite compassion upon mankind, because He, although innocent, desired to test the sufferings and the misery we endure, and through His own sufferings learn to have mercy and compassion upon ours.

The Divine Mercy is eternal, and He will have mercy on the contrite as long as He is God. Hence, David sang: The mercy of the Lord is from eternity unto eternity upon them that fear Him. For from all eternity God decreed to make happy them that fear Him, to save them from every misery, in particular from damnation. To this end Divine Mercy anticipates the actions of the just, it accompanies and guides them until death. God embraces all in His fatherly arms, great and small, rich and poor; no one is excluded who turns to Him with contrition. We read in holy Scriptures: "But thou hast mercy upon all, because thou canst do all things, and overlookest the sins of men for the sake of repentance" (Wise xi, 24). No matter how numerous and grievous your sins, the mercy of God is greater and ready to forgive them. God delays the punishment so that the sinner may become converted.

God's great mercy for the contrite sinner is testified to by Jesus Christ, especially in the beautiful parable of the prodigal son. After this unhappy youth had squandered his father's substance by vicious excesses he found himself in want and privation. He reflected upon his father's kindness of heart and determined to turn to him and ask pardon for his misdeeds. And he had not even reached his father's home, when the father, filled with love, hastened toward him, embraced him tenderly, and, without reproach for his shameful life and the gravity of his offenses, clothed him

anew, and rejoiced in his return, because he was happy at the conversion of the son who had been lost.

The recalcitrant sinner, however, who is over confident of the Divine Mercy, will be all the more severely visited by the justice which he feared not. In order to understand this extremely important truth, we must remember that mercy and justice shine forth equally strong in every Divine action: His mercy always presupposes His justice. Whether God punishes or rewards, He does so always with regard to the graces that man has used or misused. Hence, we must not forget that the Divine justice will be exacting toward us.

Dear brethren, we have abundantly experienced the Divine Mercy in ourselves. Raise your eyes to the crucified Jesus, and at the sight of God incarnate, who bled upon the Cross, in order to deliver us from hell and lead us to heaven, you will perceive the most extreme effort of His love. We have been born in the bosom of His holy Church, we have been led by the light of the Catholic faith, received nourishment for our souls in the Holy Sacraments, instructed through His holy Gospel. But if, instead of corresponding to these graces by a righteous life, we multiply our sins, then we become worse than unbelievers, and the misuse of the mercies of Divine goodness will burden us with the wrath of Divine justice.

God is all benevolence and kindness, but when we take this as an indulgence to sin, we forget that God is also just. As the Divine clemency and goodness should encourage us, so, too, His justice ought to make us fear. God is all merciful, but reflect for how many years He has endured your sins, without punishing them; now, at any moment, stern justice may follow upon this great mercy. God is good, but His goodness can not stand in opposition to His sanctity; it can not foster weakness, it can not favor hatred,

nor sensual passions, it can not encourage injustice and fraud, nor does it intend to populate heaven with profligates and adulterers. It is a just judgment of God that those who have ignored His mercy should be made to feel the effects of His justice.

Oh, sinner, upon you and upon you only, it depends to choose whether God should be your merciful Saviour, or your stern judge. You can now obtain mercy from God through contrition and penance; and upon your free will depends eternal death. Your stubborness in sin will ultimately involve a severe judgment. God is all love, and desires the salvation of all. Nevertheless, He lets us have what we choose, be it punishment or reward. Amen.

XIX. The Sacrament of Penance

Having been sanctified and made a child of God in holy Baptism, we may lose divine grace and the friendship of God by transgressing the divine law. Will heaven be then closed against us forever? Our ingratitude certainly deserves such punishment. The Lord, however, wills not the death of the sinner, but rather that he should live and be converted. The mercy of God offers us a saving anchor in the holy Sacrament of Penance. This is the sole means of salvation for the Christian who has had the misfortune to lose his baptismal innocence. I shall proceed to show you the necessity of this Sacrament, its divine institution and the great privileges which it offers you.

The word penance, in the meaning of our faith, signifies, in the first place, the return of the sinner to God; it also means the punishment which he undergoes to render satisfaction for the sins committed; finally, it is a name for the Sacrament of Penance. The penitential disposition, or the virtue of contrition, causes us to detest our sins, and to seek to make good the offense which we offered God by our sins. Contrition has always been indispensably necessary in order to obtain from the Divine Mercy the forgiveness of sin. God, who is sanctity itself, and whose justice is infinite, grants restoration to His friendship only to the repentant sinner, who has made up his mind to alter his life and to do penance. Hence, in Holy Scripture we find no example whatever of forgiveness having been obtained without repentance: we find, however, many examples that without repentance there is no pardon.

Under the new Law of Grace penance assumed a new character; Jesus Christ elevated it to the dignity of a Sacrament: He made it a religious act, the execution of which he confided to His servants. What, then, is the Sacrament of Penance? It is a Sacrament which remits sins committed after baptism to those who are properly disposed. It is, dear brethren, the means which the Saviour instituted on earth, in order to apply to us the omnipotent power of His Precious Blood and to heal the wounds which sin inflicts upon our souls. Since Divine Mercy has opened this fountain of grace in the Church, the sinner who has not recourse to the same has absolutely no hope of working out his salvation.

The reception of the Sacrament of Penance, therefore, is of necessity both a means and a duty for all those who, through the commission of mortal sin, have lost baptismal innocence. The Council of Trent, says: "This Sacrament is as necessary to salvation for those who have fallen after baptism, as baptism is necessary for those who have not yet been regenerated." Perfect contrition may, under certain circumstances, take the place of the Sacrament of Penance. A sinner not able to find a priest to whom he may confess, may obtain reconciliation with God by perfect contrition, if, at the same time, he has the sincere intention of going to Confession as soon as possible.

When did our divine Saviour give authority to His Church to remit sins? He bestowed this power upon His apostles when He said to them: "Amen, I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven." He confirmed this authority shortly before His Ascension, when He appeared among the Disciples, breathed upon them and said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and

whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." The Sacrament of Penance was instituted, therefore, by the Son of God, to whom is given all power in heaven and on earth. This power He granted to His Apostles and to their lawful successors in the priesthood; a power over souls which reaches unto heaven, because God in heaven confirms the sentence which is thus pronounced upon earth. He appointed judges over the conscience of men with authority to decide whether sinners were worthy to have their sins forgiven them. He gave them this divine power of actually and really forgiving or retaining the sins of men, according as absolution is bestowed or withheld. This power the divine Saviour made so comprehensive that there is no sin, however great and abominable, which the Sacrament of Penance cannot wipe out.

And what are the salutary effects of the Sacrament of Penance? In order to comprehend the inestimable greatness of the blessing which the divine Saviour bestows upon us in this Sacrament, it is necessary to consider what mortal sin is, and what immeasurable injury it does to the soul. The sin which man commits offends the Supreme Lord of the Universe, the omnipotent God who could annihilate men at the very moment at which they offend Him. The man who commits a mortal sin insults God in His very presence, before His eyes, in the same moment that God is heaping blessings upon him. Mortal sin robs the soul of the grace and friendship of God, the best and most tender of Fathers, it deprives the soul of the merit of good works it has acquired, deprives it of its right to heaven, and makes hell its portion. A horrible deed, therefore, is mortal sin. Behold, oh sinner, how heaven is closed to you, and hell awaits you. And must you abandon yourself to despair, are you helpless? Oh, no, listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, who calls back the strayed lamb. Do penance, He exhorts you, come to

Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, you who are under the burden of your sins, you who languish in the way of ungodliness: I will refresh you. Assisted by My grace, give up sin forever, hasten to the feet of My priest, deposit in his heart an humble confession of your sins, and he will absolve thee from thy sins. I, your God, have given power in his hands, and your sins will be wiped out.

How merciful, indeed, is God! What gratitude do we owe Him for having given us the Sacrament of Penance! It opens heaven, and closes hell; it restores to us the graces and friendship of God; it causes the return to us of our merits and good works; it gives us again a claim upon heaven, gives us new strength, fresh endurance upon the path of salvation; it gives our conscience a sweet peace, extinguishes the fire of the passions, bridles evil inclinations, and fortifies our will in good deeds.

We must, therefore, frequently have recourse to this source of grace and expiation, particularly if we should have the misfortune of falling into grievous sin. Beware, however, of receiving this Sacrament merely perfunctorily; take pains, rather, to insure the interior preparation and disposition of heart necessary for a worthy reception of this great Sacrament. Your endeavors should be directed towards proper preparation, by being truly contrite of heart, penetrated by horror of your sins, and in forming a firm resolution to alter your life and make good the insults you offered to God.

In conclusion, let me urge and exhort you not to postpone your sincere conversion. Delay is dangerous. The Divine Mercy, it is true, is infinite, but for us there is but one lifetime, and the Holy Ghost teaches us that the wrath of God soon follows upon His mercy (Eccl. v, 6, 9). "To persevere in sin," says St. Chrysostom, "means to have the malice of the devil." Be grateful for the gifts

which God has given you, and do not permit sin to dwell in your heart, but cleanse yourself in the wholesome ablution of the Sacrament of Penance, so that you may participate in the sweet peace of the children of God, and become worthy of admittance to the ranks of the elect in heaven. Amen.

XX. Preparation for the Reception of the Holy Eucharist

Amongst the countless benefactions of God there is none in which His goodness and love shines forth more magnificently than in the holy Eucharist. What a miracle of love! A God makes Himself the food of man, and this not only for once, but whenever man desires to partake of it. He not only allows us, no, He commands us to receive Him, under pain of exclusion from eternal life.

For this reason our chief care should be directed towards preparing ourselves properly for holy Communion, so that our soul may appear as a worthy, or, rather, not wholly unworthy dwelling for the Divine Guest. If we reflect that a lowly creature can receive Him, who is his God, his Creator, the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, in whose hands reposes man's temporal and eternal destiny, and that this creature is allowed to form such an intimate union with his God, could even the most conscientious and careful preparation on our part appear really sufficient? And if our preparation can never do justice to the infinite greatness of God who descends to us, ought it not at least be as good as it is in our power to make? God will have compassion upon the infirmity and weakness of our nature, but He cannot be expected to overlook faults that proceed from culpable negligence. Let us consider, therefore, in what consists the preparation required for the reception of the holy Eucharist, so that we may draw wholesome lessons from this instruction for the good of our souls.

The preparation required for the worthy reception of holy Communion consists in the following two points: in purifying the conscience, and in fervor of devotion. The former is necessary to

avoid an unworthy and sacrilegious Communion. The latter is required that our Communion may obtain for us the greatest blessing. There is required, therefore, above all, the spiritual life of the soul which consists in the possession of sanctifying grace. This is the wedding garment without which we are not permitted to take part in the Eucharistic banquet. If we are conscious of a grievous sin, we must, first of all, purify our soul by a good confession. I say a *good* confession, one which leaves no well-founded uneasiness of conscience, a confession which has reinstated us in the state of divine grace.

In order to render to the holy Eucharist the veneration due to it, and to reap from holy Communion the precious fruits which the Lord offers us, there is required, also, the spirit of true piety. Let us suppose that your conscience does not reproach you with grievous sin. Yet, if you were to approach the holy Table in an indifferent manner, and if your heart were full of worldly thought and even venial sin, if you went to holy Communion not so much from a desire to unite yourself to Jesus Christ as for the sake of appearance, if you were lacking in lively faith and ardent love, then, while not committing a sacrilege by an unworthy Communion, you would receive little advantage for your soul.

And in what consists this piety, this fervent devotion which we must have when we approach the Lord's Table? It consists: (1) in the cleansing of your soul from every attachment of venial sin; (2) in the adorning of your soul with Christian virtues. Above all, we must purify our soul and free it from every attachment to venial sin; we must renounce venial sin to which we have been addicted. These are the faults which hinder us from receiving the full blessings of holy Communion. Do not believe that the abode in a heart given to vain things of this world, a heart stained by many venial

sins, is a becoming abode for the Divine Guest. God is highly displeased therewith, because He is a God of purity, and according to His nature is the enemy of every impurity: these sins prevent also the faithful cooperation of the soul with grace. It is, therefore, of supreme importance to purify our souls from remnants of a sinful attachment, so that we may receive the Immaculate Divine Lamb with profit as our soul's nourishment.

This purification of the soul from sinful attachment should be joined with its adornment by holy virtues. We should gaze with the eyes of faith on the Saviour, concealed in the Sacrament, and consider that He is the God of infinite greatness and majesty, a God of infinite purity and sanctity, a God of infinite goodness and mercy: our Redeemer, the Spouse and Physician of our souls, who has a great desire to unite Himself to us, and to communicate to us His inexpressible gifts. These thoughts will not only result in proper exterior reverence and recollection of spirit, but also in interior acts which will serve as a close preparation to holy Communion: the exercise of adoration and profound humility, in contemplation of the exalted greatness of God on the one hand, and of our nothingness on the other; the exercise of holy and wholesome fear at sight of the Divine sanctity, as contrasted with our perversity and unworthiness. Such fear will arouse in us a more sincere contrition which will purify our soul and free it from inclination to sin. Furthermore, there proceed from such thoughts acts of love and confidence, and an ardent desire to unite ourselves with Him.

From this disposition of the heart springs that holy devotion with which we should be filled when approaching the Holy Table. But whatever we may do, we can never be fully worthy of this great grace, and for this reason we must address our devout prayers to Jesus, that He may vouchsafe to supply, by His grace, that which

is lacking in us, and to inspire our hearts with dispositions and sentiments of devotion, humbly acknowledging that, despite all our earnest efforts, we are unworthy of receiving Him in our hearts.

Now you may ask, dear brethren, how it is that the great blessings of this Sacrament seem to produce so little effect upon many Christians? The whole fault may lie in their insufficient preparation. Let us endeavor to improve in this respect, dear brethren, and let us consider that holy Communion is the greatest, most holy, and most important act which we can undertake, and for that reason there is no other which it is so dangerous to perform indifferently, from habit, or as a matter of custom, without the true spirit of piety. **Amen.**

XXI. The Effects of Holy Communion

As the Most Holy Eucharist surpasses all other Sacraments in excellence and dignity, so it also surpasses them in power and efficacy. The growth of grace effected through other Sacraments of the living is in the holy Eucharist all the greater as the nature of this Sacrament is more exalted. The other Sacraments are channels, which bring to us the saving waters of grace; this one, however, brings the very source of grace, and while the others operate through the strength which comes through Jesus Christ, in this one Jesus Christ Himself, in His own Person, pours out upon us the effects of His grace, nourishes us with His Presence, lives and dwells in us with all the treasures of His grace. Of such magnitude is the growth of grace which this Sacrament effects in those who worthily communicate, that we may call it the abundance and fulness of graces: the grace of enlightenment for the understanding of charity for the heart, strength for the will, fortitude, sweetness and delight for the spirit.

But the characteristic and very special effect of this Sacrament is that it feeds our souls. Jesus Christ willed to institute this Sacrament under the forms of bread and wine, in order to show us that He is the supernatural food of our souls.

The first effect of food, one upon which all other effects depend, is to unite itself most intimately with us. It not only enters the body, it becomes part of it, of the flesh, nerves and bones. So, too, Jesus Christ, in the holy Eucharist, unites Himself substantially and intimately with us, that we, as it were, form with Him only one body and one soul. "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood,

abideth in me, and I in him" (John vi, 57). And as material food preserves the life of the body, which could not exist without it, gives it strength and promotes its growth, so the holy Eucharist supports the life of our soul, which is santifying grace; it gives it power and strength and elevates it to a higher degree of perfection and sanctity.

The holy Eucharist is our remedy for the weakness of the soul. Temptations which assail us, passions which cause us perpetual warfare, lapses into venial sin to which we are daily exposed; all things that enfeeble our soul, and if not checked, would lead to the death of mortal sin. The holy Eucharist helps in a marvelous way to overcome temptations, and affords us mighty weapons against Satan and his suggestions.

As regards our passions, that other source of our weakness, it is certain that if the holy Eucharist does not wholly deliver us from them, it at least alleviates their violence and subdues them. Hence St. Bernard said to the faithful: "If some of you no longer experience the violent emotions of anger, of envy, of intemperance, ascribe it to the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ which you have received in holy Communion." For the sensual passion in particular, which is by far the most violent and most dangerous of our enemies, this Sacrament is a powerful bridle. For it is specially ordained to heal the mortal wounds inflicted by the evils of concupiscence, and to moderate its fire. The immaculate Flesh of Christ imparts its purity to ours; His pure Blood purifies our blood which has been corrupted by sin.

Finally, the holy Eucharist purifies us from our daily faults, whereby are not understood grievous sins, which, as a rule, are only wiped out through the Sacrament of Penance, but those lesser faults into which we fall daily. The Council of Trent assures us

that the holy Eucharist has the power to efface the same. So, therefore, the holy Eucharist preserves in us the spiritual life by removing or suppressing everything that tends to destroy it.

Furthermore, corporal food not only preserves the life of the body, but fortifies, strengthens and develops it, so the Eucharistic Bread not only preserves the soul from death, but causes it to acquire virtue upon virtue and to increase in holiness. Hence, in holy Scripture, it is prefigured in that mysterious bread which the Angel presented to Elias in the wilderness. This bread gave to the Prophet such extraordinary power that he, without partaking of any other food, journeyed for forty days and forty nights unto the summit of Mount Horeb. What an impressive picture of the strength with which the holy Eucharist inspires us to walk upon the path of the Lord, and upon the difficult road of our pilgrimage, unto the Kingdom of Heaven.

The power of this Divine Food is so great that it uplifts us above ourselves and makes of us spiritual and heavenly beings. Jesus Christ desired to let us participate in this Sacrament, in His Flesh and Blood, in His Divinity, so as to grant us participation in His Divine Spirit, and through this Sacramental union to lead us to a perfect union with Himself. He desired to transform us completely into Himself, not by changing our nature into His, but by transforming our spirit into His. This is the great and principal effect of the holy Eucharist: it clothes, penetrates and fills us with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, with His humility, His meekness, His charity, and all His virtues. Hence, those who worthily communicate may exclaim with the Apostle: "And I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." For the Spirit of Jesus Christ, which He imparts to us in the most holy Sacrament, becomes the source and the soul of all our thoughts, our inclinations and actions. What

more can be said to illustrate the power and efficacy of this Divine Sacrament?

Dear brethren, if you approach the Lord's Supper merely from habit, or because it is the custom, with little devotion and lukewarm preparation, with a heart filled with worldly, even sinful inclinations, small wonder if you feel no spark of that saving power which the holy Eucharist bestows. The salutary effects of food stand in relation to the more or less regular use we make of it. A food may be ever so nourishing and strengthening, yet this strength must be renewed. And as Christ is the food and nourishment of the soul, why do you remain away from Him for months at a time? Why do some, indeed, receive Him only once a year? Food partaken of so seldom cannot produce lasting results.

Let us, therefore, approach not only well prepared, but frequently, the holy Table. Let us put aside lukewarmness and indifference. Then we shall learn to know from actual experience the salutary and precious effects of the holy Eucharist, which will be produced in us to the sanctification of our souls. Amen.

XXII. The Fruits of the Resurrection

To-day's feast is the most joyful and glorious of all the festivals of the Church. The altars are beautifully decorated, triumphal hymns are sung, the faithful are invited to rejoice, for we celebrate the triumph of the Redeemer, the confirmation of His teaching, the pledge of our hopes, the Mystery of the glorious Resurrection. I will endeavor to explain briefly what the important mystery of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ means, and what sentiments should animate our hearts if we are to participate in the fruits of the Resurrection.

Our Saviour foretold that He would be betrayed, scourged, mocked, hung upon the Cross, and also that He would rise again upon the third day. All happened as foretold. Many had been restored to life before that glorious day; but the Resurrection of Christ differed vastly from that of the others who were recalled to life. These returned to life, it is true, but they had to die again. Jesus Christ, however, arose never to die again. Hence His Resurrection was the first complete and perfect one. Moreover, those others did not return to life of their own accord; Jesus Christ alone arose by His own power. As God-man life and death were in His hand. Although the Jews sealed His tomb and closed it with a heavy stone, even caused it to be guarded by soldiers, still Jesus Christ, of His own will, issued forth triumphant and unimpeded. He permitted His sacred corpse to remain in the grave only so long as was necessary to prove that He had been really dead.

Theologians attribute to transfigured bodies four special qualities, which the risen body of the Redeemer without doubt possessed in

the highest degree; namely, mobility or agility, subtlety or spirituality, transparency, and impossibility of suffering. The blessed body of the Saviour arose endowed with this agility (*agilitas*), and could transport itself without effort from one place to another, no matter how remote. It was of such subtlety (*subtilitas*), moreover, that it could penetrate concrete and dense bodies without the least resistance, and pass through walls and closed doors at will. It is true that the Lord willed that an angel should roll the stone from the grave, but this took place after Jesus was risen, to convince the holy women that He had left the grave and was risen as He had said. The transparency (*claritas*) rendered Him luminous and shining as the sun. The inability to suffer (*impassibilitas*) finally rendered the glorified body of the Lord free from all infirmities of the flesh, and filled it with inexpressible happiness, because, as St. Thomas teaches, after accomplishing the redemption of mankind, the most holy soul of Jesus endowed His body with its own blessedness.

Jesus Christ, however, retained in His body the marks of the five wounds, and He showed them to the apostles, as St. John relates. He retained them as a sign of His triumph over sin and Satan. These sacred wounds, so consoling for the just, should fill sinners with fear, because they will one day be their reproach and confusion, and the Redeemer will say to them: 'Behold my pierced hands and feet; behold my side, which was opened for love of you; but you would not enter."

St. Thomas tells us that the Resurrection was as necessary for Jesus as for ourselves. For Him the Resurrection was necessary in order that He might be given the glory of the Resurrection, since He had so willingly humbled Himself to the ignominous death of the Cross. For us it was likewise necessary, because at sight of the risen Redeemer, returned to life by His own power,

our faith in Christ, the God-man, is confirmed, and our hope fortified, because, since Jesus Christ, our Head, has risen, we may confidently hope that we, His members, shall also rise from the dead. By the Resurrection Christ finally completed His work of redemption. He suffered and died in order to heal our infirmities, and He rose from death in order to urge us to the resurrection from sin. For this reason the Apostle writes: "As Christ is risen from the dead, we also are obliged to walk in newness of life." We may participate in the glorious Resurrection of the Redeemer by imitating His patience, His meekness, His obedience, His charity, His mortification—in brief, the virtues which He practised during His whole life.

Hence, all those who in this celebration of the Easter festival still retain an attachment for the vanities of the world, for sensual pleasures, dangerous attractions, unlawful friendships, can derive no profit from the mystery of the Lord's Resurrection. But those who sincerely detest the error of their past lives, who endeavor to love God and are careful not to offend Him, who are animated by a burning desire for the things that are of God, they may say, in all truth, that in a spiritual manner they are risen with the divine Saviour.

Purify your hearts therefore, dear brethren; avoid sin, live according to the principles of the divine Commandments. In this way you will rise from the death of sin. Live in a spiritual way with Jesus Christ, and you will share in the brilliancy of His glory, when the divine Redeemer, as the Apostle teaches, will pour out the rays of His light upon the spirit and flesh of the just. Then will they become more brilliant than the sun, and be unspeakably happy in the glorious vision of God according to the words of the Redeemer who promised it. Then shall the just shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Amen.

XXIII. On Frequent Communion

Precious and abundant are the fruits in which those participate who, after a worthy preparation, receive the most holy Eucharist. In order, therefore, to reap the greatest benefit to our souls, we must receive holy Communion frequently. I am well aware that the commandment of the Church only prescribes Communion once a year. But this commandment was instituted on account of the indifference of Catholics. The Church, seeing the unconcern of so many of her children, showed her prudence in this as in other matters.

If one single Communion a year saves one from transgressing the commandment of the Church, it is certainly not enough for that growth in virtue which is the duty of every Christian. We are obliged, quite irrespective of this commandment of the Church, to correspond with the divine Commandment which bids us to employ the means given us for the salvation of our soul. I will explain to you the motives which would impel us to receive holy Communion frequently, and will also examine the value of the excuses offered by persons who shirk this duty.

There are two reasons which should incite us to the frequent reception of holy Communion. The first of them proceeds from the purpose of Jesus Christ in instituting this Sacrament, which is apparent in the manner in which He instituted it and also from the expressions He made use of in speaking of it. He gave us this Sacrament under the symbol of a food, of a banquet, to make us understand that it really is a food, a nourishment, of which we should often make use, in the same manner as we often make use

of food for the preservation of our bodily life. The words used at the institution of the Sacrament could not be plainer or more impressive. In order to imbue us with an ardent desire for this food of the soul, He explains that it it a heavenly Food, the Bread of immortal life. And should invitation and promises avail not, He adds the threat of exclusion from life eternal: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you" (Jno. vi, 54).

We cannot doubt, then, that it is Christ's desire to see us frequently at His holy Table.

The other reason that should cause us to receive holy Communion frequently, is our own need, as well as the marvelous efficacy of this Sacrament. Our need is the same, no matter in what condition we may find ourselves. We are either penitents, who have just left the state of sin, and requiring strengthening food to conquer our sinful habits and to persevere in the grace restored; or, we are inclined to be indifferent and without zeal for the Divine service, even if we keep free from grievous errors, and in this dangerous condition we should frequently seek fresh strength in order to arouse our faith and devotion. Finally, we may be good Christians, filled with zeal for our soul's welfare. In this happy state we must take care to persevere, to march onward onto perfection, as upon the road to salvation there can be no standing still. Not to proceed means to fall back. But where may we find the grace necessary to protect us if we are converted sinners; to stimulate us if we are lukewarm; the grace of perseverance and continual progress if we are pious and God-fearing, if not in the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist? It is the excellent remedy prepared by God to preserve us in the spiritual life, to confirm and perfect us. The influx of grace, however, is naturally more or less abundant, according to the

frequent or infrequent use we make of the holy Eucharist. Hence it follows that as our need is a constant one, the application of the remedy should likewise be constant. Those who receive only at Easter time can not expect to derive from this Sacrament the advantage and strength needed for their spiritual welfare.

Now, let us listen to the excuses often presented to explain the staying away from holy Communion. The first false pretext is a so-called reverence for the dignity and sublimity of so great a Sacrament; men feel themselves unworthy of such intimacy with Christ. Certainly, in our holy Religion there is nothing more sublime, more sacred and more worthy of adoration than the Sacrament of the Eucharist; yet, in order to receive it, the Lord does not require of us a sanctity, purity, and perfection similar to His own, otherwise not even the greatest saints would have been worthy of this favor. From us there is only such preparation required that corresponds to our ability, the deficiency will be supplied through the grace which God never refuses to anyone who on his part does his best to prepare himself.

Some people will assert that they find themselves so laden with faults and imperfections that it would not seem fit for them to approach often the Lord's Table. If these faults are the common effects of our natural human frailty, they should not deter us from receiving frequently, but, on the contrary, should induce us approach the holy Table, as the Blessed Sacrament was instituted for the purpose of purifying us from such faults. Just because we are weak and unpersevering we must take refuge with the heavenly Physician who can heal us of all our ills. Instead of saying, "I cannot go often to holy Communion, because I am not virtuous enough," say, rather, "I will take pains to change my behavior, to purify myself from my faults, so that I can go often to holy Communion

and avail myself of its inestimable graces." This would be thinking and speaking in a truly Christian manner.

Others allege manifold occupations as an excuse for their negligent and infrequent reception of holy Communion. The business of our eternal salvation is the sole important occupation of our lives, and holy Communion is certainly the surest and best help in this all-important business. Such an excuse has been condemned by Jesus Christ Himself in the parable of the great supper, the type of the eucharistic banquet. The Master condemned those who offered the pretext of temporal affairs for not accepting the invitation. Can you reasonably believe that the Lord has given you life in order to employ the same entirely in the affairs of the body, with hardly a thought for the interests of your soul?

Finally, there are the Catholics who absent themselves from the holy Table on account of grievous sins which they will not forsake. As long as they continue in their attachment to their sins and have no wish to amend their lives, they are not worthy of the privilege the Lord offers them. Their reason for staying away from holy Communion is not an excuse, but rather an accusation. They love sin better than God, and they renounce God in order to serve the devil.

Dear brethren, let us live so that we can go often to the Lord's Table, to enrich ourselves there with fresh graces which will strengthen us to proceed courageously upon the road of salvation. Do not be satisfied with receiving only at Easter or at long intervals. The more you absent yourselves from holy Communion, the less security have you for your devotion and your zeal. Love the Lord with your whole heart, think seriously on eternity, and you will surely desire to unite yourselves frequently with Jesus Christ in this divine Sacrament. Amen.

XXIV. Reverence in Church

Our Saviour, at all times so forbearing and humble, severely rebuked the money-changers in the Temple at Jerusalem. Why were the kind Saviour's hands armed with a scourage? What changed the merciful benefactor of men into the severe Judge? It was the desecration of the house of God.

What a terrible threat to those who are in the habit of offending God in His own sanctuary. The Lord will drive them out with the scourge. Indeed, it is a great offense to affront Him in His own dwelling; great ingratitude to dishonor Him in the very place where He distributes His graces in abundance. Every sin, no matter where committed, offends God. For there is no place, however desolate and remote, where God is not present. Yet, He has set aside certain places where He wishes man to offer to His divine Majesty in a particular way the tribute of adoration, of love and devotion. These places so dedicated are the churches. He has declared that they are in a special manner His dwelling-places, and that He will ever be disposed to listen there to those who take refuge at the throne of His goodness. The Temple He calls the place of mercy and of peace, of sacrifice and of prayer. And He has constituted Himself the most zealous defender of its honor, and He decrees that holiness shall ever abide therein.

Is it meet, then, to enter His sanctuary as carelessly and indifferently as one would enter a shop or a place of pleasure? What disrespect to appear there with a frivolous, irreverent or haughty demeanor. What a disgrace to appear there in immodest, vain, or unbecoming garments, desirous only of attracting attention. What

indecorum to walk around in church, gaze at everybody, chat and joke, even ridicule those who conduct themselves with piety and recollection, not sparing the consecrated servants of the altar, conversing there about worldly affairs, perhaps carrying on conversations incompatible even with ordinary propriety.

Where is there an earthly ruler who, in his palace, would tolerate vulgar revilings or irreverence? Behold with what respectful and reverential conduct one enters the palace of prince or president, with what deference the visit is announced, the politeness and servility observed during an audience with one high in office. And yet here it is a question of mortal men, princes and rulers who one day must render an account of their stewardship. And the King of Kings, the Lord of Hosts, upon whose power the whole universe depends, whose Kingdom has no end, should He have to endure contempt in His own abode, at the very footsteps of the throne of His Majesty and glory? Is this not the grossest offense, the greatest indignity?

But let us pass from the detestable offense which the profaner of the sanctuary offers to God, to the insufferable ingratitude which he returns for the many graces which the Lord dispenses in His hallowed Temple. Tell me, what gave you the garment of innocence and the right to heaven, when you were still children of wrath, abhorrent to heaven, enemies of God, and slaves of Satan? Behold, the baptismal font, cast your eyes upon the blessed water. Was it not this which, in the laving of your body, bestowed the grace of regeneration upon your soul? And as you increased in years, and arrived at the age of reason, when you had stained your soul with the guilt of sin, who wiped out your sins, who placed you again in the blessed ranks of the just? From the confessional you stepped forth reinstated in the grace of God. Contemplate the altar upon which daily the most innocent Lamb of God offers Himself up to the

eternal Father. Look at the sacred Tabernacle, in which the incarnate King of glory tarries among us. Not content with attending to your petitions, and listening to your prayers, He feeds you with His own Flesh, to strengthen you for the earthly pilgrimage. From this pulpit is given you the living bread of the Divine Word; here you are taught the truths of faith; here the path to heaven is shown to you. And can, in this blessed place, those who receive all these benefits, have the heart to offend God, dishonor Him? Can they be so forgetful of God's glory and majesty to make His church a place for vanity and frivolity?

Let them remember that God will avenge the insult, that He will pour out the phials of His wrath upon such abominable ingratitude. "I will lay thy ways upon thee, O, ungrateful nation," He threatens through the prophet Ezechiel, "and I will pour out my wrath upon thee, and I will accomplish my anger in thee." Wo unto those who profane the House of the Lord!

The sudden death of Oza, the fire which consumed the sons of Aaron, the destruction of the Bethsamites, the defeat of the Philistines, the chastisement of Antiochus, the fall of Jerusalem, these all are examples of the Divine wrath at the profanation of His sanctuary. Even in our own days the great calamities that befall cities and nations, must we not interpret them as the warning of Jeremias who says: "It is the vengeance of the Lord, vengeance because of the profanation of His Temple"? And to these chastisements, these physical misfortunes, there are added others, involving the soul, and more terrifying even than pestilence and wars.

Dear brethren, take these warnings to heart. Come to church with due reverence and be not forgetful of the honor due to the Lord of the Universe. Remember the words of the Apostle: "For if anyone violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy." Amen.

XXV. On Peace

Isaias, who predicted the birth of the Redeemer, His Passion and death, His Resurrection and glorification, bestows upon Him, amongst other titles, that of "Prince of Peace." And hardly had Christ entered into this world when angels proclaimed peace to all men of good will. This peace He left to the faithful through His Apostles, when, on His way to the garden of Gethsemane to begin His agonizing Passion, He said to them: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you" (Jno. xiv, 27). This precious gift He confirmed when He appeared to His Apostles after His Resurrection.

Peace, therefore, is the priceless inheritance which our Saviour Jesus Christ left us. God abides with His grace in souls that possess true peace. This peace cannot be given by the world, but by God alone, and they only can participate in it who courageously combat their evil inclinations and walk in the way of God's commandments. Man is at peace when his body is governed by reason, and his soul by the commands of God. It is impossible to have peace if, by resisting the will of God, man becomes God's enemy. But are not the honors and pleasures of the world capable of appeasing the longing of the heart and of giving it peace? Alas, the pleasures of this world are disappointments. The heart may crave them, but they are not capable of satisfying our desires. Our longing is directed towards a positive, unerring, and infinite good. Our heart cannot be at peace if it has not all that it desires, and therefore we shall ever be troubled and restless until we have found our peace in God, the sole center of every good.

Worldly persons, so says St. John Chrysostom, have no true interior peace. Their joys are exterior and material, and such can never make the heart truly happy. A young person is jubilant in the proximity of the idol of his affection, yet he is not at peace. He is worried by the uncertainty and shortcomings of human nature. The wealthy contemplate with satisfaction their horded treasures, but the care to preserve and increase them, the fear of losing them, make them restless at heart. The cares, contradictions, and imperfections that render all worldly happiness uncertain and vain, prove that the pleasures of the senses are never capable of thoroughly satisfying our hearts.

The man who leads a truly Christian life, who lives in the fear of the Lord, removed from the deceitful vanities of the world, from the follies of the worldly minded, he it is who knows true peacefulness. Worldly persons may consider him troubled in mind, unsatisfied, even accuse him of folly because he makes many sacrifices. But the ones to be pitied are they who are sighing under the tyrannical yoke of their passions. They are incapable of seeing the peace of heart of the just, the sweet delight which he enjoys in God, while he finds in the peace of his conscience a foretaste of future happiness.

Have we not a striking proof of this truth in David? He was continually threatened with death by Saul, but because he was just and God-fearing the peace of his heart was never disturbed. Hence, he cried out: "O, how great is the multitude of thy sweetness, O Lord, which thou hast hidden for them that fear thee. Thy comforts have given joy to my soul." David here speaks of a hidden interior sweetness, of an interior consolation, of the joys of the spirit. In this world we should not seek the gratification of the body, but the peace of the soul. Those who take zealous

pains to serve God are rewarded with interior spiritual joys. Jesus Christ has promised that he who bears the yoke of His Law, and imitates His meekness and humility, shall find true peace and rest of the soul. This peace is inseparable from a good conscience. St. Jerome tells us that we cannot enjoy true peace of soul if we do not fight courageously with the weapons of faith; if we do not bridle the vehement desires of the flesh; if we do not overcome concupiscence. Hence, when Christ promised peace to His disciples, He called it *His* peace. *"My* peace I give unto you," He said. Let us oppose, therefore, dear brethren, those unseemly attachments, those unworthy friendships, shameless discourses, unprofitable and dangerous pastimes. Let us overcome with the courage of an ardently believing heart, discord, desire for revenge, and hatred. Let us curb our eyes, so that they may not seek sinful sights; our hearing, so that we may not listen gladly to calumnies and shameless conversations; our tongue, that it may not be sullied by detraction, quarreling, cursing, and lies. Let us vanquish slothfulness in the service of God and in things that pertain to our soul's welfare.

The Holy Spirit assures us that mercy and truth have met, justice and peace have kissed. There can be no peace where there is not justice, but where justice abides peace is united to it. And what is that justice which we must possess in order to enjoy peace? Man is called just when he esteems only the true good, when in all things he orders himself according to the Divine will, loves God with his whole heart, and cheerfully obeys His Commandments. Such a man is in the possession of peace; he is at peace with God, whom he fervently loves, with his neighbors, on whom he looks as his brethren, and he is at peace with himself, so that his heart is in blissful repose.

Let us understand that not the world, but God alone, can give that peace which Jesus Christ has left us as an heritage. If you would secure this peace, you must combat your passions, keep concupiscence under control, live free from sin, and be faithful observers of God's holy law. Then you will make your peace with God, with your neighbor, and with yourselves. Amen.

FATHERS
ST. JOSEPH'S
SAN JOSE,

XXVI. Interior Prayer

One of the chief reasons why so much confusion reigns in the world, why so many persons lead a life so little in accord with the last end for which they were created, and for the attainment of which they were placed upon this earth, is that they scarcely ever seriously occupy their minds with the consideration of the eternal truths. Completely absorbed by the material world which surrounds them, they live only for the world, and forget life eternal. God's benefits are infinite in magnitude and number, still they will not enkindle love in our hearts unless we frequently ponder upon them. In order to awaken the disposition necessary for a good life, meditation is indispensable. Meditation, interior prayer, makes of us true Christians and points the way of truth, which alone leads to salvation. I will endeavor to show you that the exercise of interior prayer is not difficult, and that those who apply themselves to it draw from it inestimable profit.

Interior prayer, or meditation, consists in interior conversation of the soul with God. In the exercise of its three faculties, the memory, the understanding, and the will, the soul worships the Divine Majesty, meditates upon His mysteries, implores pardon for faults committed, and asks for the necessities of this life, and, the most important, for help in attaining life everlasting. Many are of opinion that the practice of interior prayer is difficult, and not a few suppose that interior prayer can be practiced only by religious, who, in the retirement of their cloisters, devote their whole lives to the service of God. This is a great mistake, an inspiration of the devil by which he would avert our thoughts from the most

important affair of our soul's salvation, in order to draw us down into his abyss, as partners in his misery.

In many passages of Holy Writ, we find that Jesus Christ impresses upon us the necessity of praying at all times. He did not mean verbal prayer, because it would be impossible for us to converse with God at all times verbally. He meant, therefore, interior prayer, which He would not have recommended so impressively had it not been possible for us all. He declared that His commandments are easy of accomplishment. Holy Church teaches that the Lord enjoins nothing impossible upon us, but, in giving us precepts, wills that we should do what we are able to do, and He will come to our assistance with His grace.

The Church is the place set apart for prayer, but it does not follow that we cannot or should not communicate with God outside of its portals. The apostle teaches us to perform all our works in the name of Jesus, and this would be interior prayer. Hence, you can pray interiorly with the greatest ease if you would be as solicitous for your salvation as you are in regard to earthly matters.

In the morning, when leaving your bed, raise your mind to God, worship Him as the supreme Lord of the universe, thank Him for His benefits, resolve not to offend Him, and to perform all your works throughout the day in His honor. Then go about the affairs of your state of life, but raise up your mind from time to time to God. Remember His sacred presence, that He is your beginning and last end. Reflect that we all must die, and that after our departure from this life we shall either enjoy the vision of God eternally with the saints, or we shall have to endure the torments of hell eternally with the damned. Reflect upon the mysteries and the eternal truths that present themselves to your spirit, draw your conclusions, present your petitions to God, and yield to the pious

feelings which will arise in your heart. In this manner you will practise interior prayer with great profit.

You will draw great advantage from so holy an exercise. Whilst we are praying we commune in confidence with God, as children with their father, as friend with friend, so that we, still living on earth, already enjoy in advance a measure of the delightful happiness of heaven. The Lord beholds with pleasure the confidence we place in Him, and in return He speaks to our hearts enlightening them with His light, strengthening them with His grace and enkindling them with His holy Divine Charity. Thus we attain strength to resist the temptations of the evil one; we are upon our guard, in order not to lose the Divine approval through sin; there is awakened in us the desire for eternal possessions, and, realizing the vanity of everything worldly, we resolve not to fix our hearts upon the perishable. In a word, prayer makes us like unto the angels, not only because it is an effect of our spiritual faculties similar to theirs, but, too, because it imparts to us a truly angelical, pure and holy life.

Now, dear brethren, since you know what interior prayer is, and how easily it may be practised by all, what advantages it affords us, do not neglect to practise it frequently. Be assured that when once you become accustomed to it, it will cost you no effort; it will be your sweetest and pleasantest occupation. Amen.

XXVII. The Feast of the Ascension

The personal mission of the Redeemer is ended to-day; the great work of the redemption of the human race has been accomplished; the world has been instructed by His teachings and His example; His Resurrection has been attested by His numerous apparitions; there is nothing to detain Him. He enters in triumph into His eternal glory, to take His place at the right of the Father.

After Jesus Christ had instructed His disciples in the faith, confirmed them, and given them authority over His Church, He made them accompany Him on this day to the Mount of Olives, and, standing in their midst, He took here an affectionate farewell of them. He raised His hands to bless them; and, blessing them, he began to soar upwards toward heaven, with His disciples gazing after Him in great astonishment; He rose, more brilliant than the sun, higher and higher, until a luminous cloud veiled Him from their sight. Meanwhile they kept their eyes turned toward heaven, until two men in white garments—two angels—suddenly stood before them, saying: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye there looking up into heaven? This Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven, so shall He come as you have seen Him going into heaven."

The great mystery which the Church to-day celebrates offers for our consideration two truths of supreme importance, one of them infinitely consoling, the other, terrifying. The first is that the gate of heaven, closed for so long, opens to-day before Jesus Christ, not only in order to admit the Saviour, but for us all as well. He

showed us the way thither, whilst still working amongst us; to-day He opens the entrance into heaven. He awaits us there, He calls us, and prepares our dwelling-place. From the heights of this abode of glory He opens His arms toward us; He supports our efforts by His graces. He departed from earth, but He did not forsake us. He joined His heavenly Father without separating Himself from us. He is our Mediator. Through Him we have access to the Father. He offers our prayers to the Father, in order to render them meritorious. As eternal Mediator between God and man, He continues in heaven the same office which He exercised on earth. In the mystery of this day a special circumstance should be noticed, which is of greatest interest to us. After the divine Saviour had passed from the apostles' gaze, they still kept their eyes turned heavenward in the direction He had taken. They teach thereby that heaven is the place to which our desires should be raised. Let us fasten our gaze upon this goal, in order to stimulate our efforts in striving for the same. Let us never forget, however, that in order to follow Jesus Christ into heaven, we must, first of all, follow Him upon earth. It would be self-deception to think we can attain the crown without having walked in the way of the Cross; we shall go astray if we would follow any other path than that upon which the divine Master has preceded us.

The other, the terrifying truth, which the mystery of to-day puts before us is, that Jesus Christ will come again one day, and that the earth will once more behold her God clothed with human nature. But what a difference between His first and His second coming. What humiliation, what self-abasement at the first. What splendor, what majesty at the second. At the first we behold Him lying in a crib; at the second, resting upon a luminous cloud, not in the garb of poverty, but radiant with glory. His Cross, once the emblem of

ignominy, shall then become the sign of glory. It is no longer a small crowd who flock to hear His words, to see His miracles—it is the entire human race that is gathered at His feet in order to hear the sentence. On that awful last day we shall all appear before Him. We shall hear that voice of thunder, which called the universe forth from chaos, and now commands it to return to the same. We shall see the world vanish in a moment at one sign from that omnipotent will which called it into existence. Everything will vanish from our sight. Of the innumerable multitudes of created things, there shall remain nothing but mankind, the just and the unjust, the saints and the damned. What will be our portion at that awful crisis? Upon which side shall we be ranged at that fateful separation? Will Jesus Christ have come for us in vain? Will the gate of heaven which He opened for us on this day admit us, or repel us, at the end of our days?,

Dear brethren, if we desire to make certain our entrance with Jesus into everlasting glory, it is indispensably necessary that we imitate Him upon earth. "For let this mind be in you," says St. Paul, "which was also in Jesus Christ: who debased Himself, taking the form of a servant, and humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath exalted him." There is no other way to heaven for us.

Let us imitate Him then during our short life upon earth. He will be to us a sure and infallible guide-post. Let us follow Him heavenwards, with a lively faith, by renouncing every unlawful attachment to this earth. Let us begin to live on high with our minds and hearts. Let us bear in mind that heaven is our home, that there above is our inheritance and our crown. Let us not be discouraged by the misery, the temptations and struggles of this earthly life. Jesus Christ will be our courage, our strength, our

victory. Let us console ourselves with the thought that the tribulations of this life are not of long duration; they will soon pass away, and if we bear them with patience and equanimity, they will soon gain for us the eternal abode of peace and the happiness of heaven. Amen.

XXVIII. The Feast of Pentecost

The word "Pentecost," the name of the great festival which the Church to-day celebrates, signifies the fiftieth day after Easter. This day was also observed by the Jews, because it reminded them of the law which God had given them through Moses on Mount Sinai. On this festival the entire male population of the Jewish nation assembled at Jerusalem to make their offerings from the harvest to God and to acknowledge Him as the beneficent dispenser of all benefits, and the Supreme Lord over all mankind.

The disciples of the Saviour, after His glorious ascension, kept themselves secluded in the Chamber of the Last Supper, or Cenacle, and besought Him in fervent prayer to fulfill the promise given them, and to send them the Holy Ghost, who was to guide them in all truth and fill them with heavenly comfort. And behold: on Pentecost, at the third hour, in our time nine o'clock in the forenoon, as the city of Jerusalem was filled by an immense crowd of people that had gathered for the celebration of the feast, suddenly there was heard a rushing sound from heaven as of a mighty wind, and the Holy Ghost descended over those assembled in the Chamber of the Last Supper, and rested upon the head of each one in the form of a fiery tongue. This is the holy mystery which the Church celebrates to-day. So that you may be able to celebrate the same in the fulness of spiritual comfort, I will recall briefly to your memory some facts about the Holy Ghost, and what great graces He has granted, not only to the disciples of the Lord, but to the whole Church.

God is, as you know, one, eternal, unchangeable. The three Persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, have one Divine Nature. Our feeble human understanding is incapable of comprehending the exalted mystery, that God is one in essence, and yet threefold in Person. Faith, however, grants us the strength to maintain this firmly as the truth, without fear of error. For God, in the superabundance of His goodness, has vouchsafed to reveal to us this truth. The three Divine Persons are equal to one another in perfection, because they are one and the same God. Nevertheless the Father has His origin in no other Person, whilst the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son. Hence, the Holy Ghost is the third Person of the Most Holy Trinity; He is the Love of the Father and the Son, and is one and the same God with the Father and the Son.

Jesus Christ promised that the Holy Ghost would be sent by the Father in His name. Yet, although the eternal Holy Ghost was, accordingly, sent to us by the Father and the Son, yet He is not inferior to them in anything, nor dependent upon them, as He is in reality equal to the Father and Son in all perfections, and with them constitutes but one God. When He came to mankind He did not have to leave heaven in order to betake Himself to earth, because by virtue of His Divinity He is omnipresent. He reveals His presence in particular by extraordinary signs and operations of grace.

Upon this auspicious day He descended upon the apostles in the form of fiery tongues, so as to intimate the heavenly fire which was to destroy everything imperfect in the disciples and enkindle the whole universe with holy charity. The Holy Ghost illumines and purifies our souls, so that they may recognize the truth and accept

it. He pours into our hearts the holy fear of God, distributes to us manifold and exceeding great graces, and enriches us with supernatural gifts. He comforts us in our tribulations and supports us that we may pray to God with advantage, by lavishing upon us heavenly benedictions. And although all these goods are imparted to us in the same degree by the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, because they are only one God, yet, nevertheless, they are ascribed in a particular manner to the Holy Ghost as to the source of all good, because He is the mutual love of the Father and the Son, and because these benefits proceed from the infinite love of the Almighty to mankind.

Exceeding great are the blessings which the Holy Ghost brought at His appearance in the Chamber of the Last Supper, not only to the disciples, but also to the whole Church. Then was fulfilled the prophecy of David, that through the sending forth of the Holy Spirit man should be created to a new life and the earth be renewed in fresh beauty and grace. And how efficient this miraculous transformation was. Not only did the apostles, ignorant and fearsome, now attain an abundant fulness of knowledge and courage, in order to reveal to men the true wisdom, but the people were made so tractable on their part that, at the first sermon of St. Peter after his exit from the Cenacle, three thousand of those who formerly had hated Jesus of Nazareth and His disciples were converted. By degrees the most remote countries and the most savage nations of the universe accepted belief in Jesus Christ, so that one could say with the Royal Prophet that so marvelous a change was truly the work of the omnipotent hand of God. Hence St. John Chrysostom remarks, that, with the blessed arrival of the Holy Ghost, the earth was transformed into heaven, inasmuch as He did not change the nature of men, but purified their wills through the

abundance of His grace. Fired by a holy zeal, they despised the vanities of the world, and guided by the conviction that they had not here a lasting habitation, they languished like the parched hart for the spring of all delights, and with the Apostle longed for death to live eternally with Jesus. It was a beautiful sight to behold people from the highest walks of life and the lowest, depriving themselves of their property, and laying the proceeds at the feet of the Apostle. A beautiful spectacle, indeed, was the first budding forth of Christendom, pure in morals, zealous in prayer, diligent in the frequent reception of the holy Sacraments, alert in listening to the divine Word, intimately united with one another through the holy bond of charity, so that they appeared to have but one heart and one soul.

All this happened because the Holy Ghost, by the outpouring of His grace, purified them from the insubordination of the flesh, and thus extinguished within them the glow of the old evil of concupiscence.

We all, dear brethren, thanks to the Divine mercy, have been regenerated in the water of holy Baptism, and are living in the bosom of the Catholic Church, in order to participate in the coming of the Holy Ghost and to be His loving temple. Why, then, are we so often negligent in the performance of good works, so little fired with charity towards God and our neighbor? The reason is that sin sometimes gets the upper hand, and impiety is triumphant. How can injustice, dissension, frivolous pleasures, and other works of darkness agree with the Spirit of light? Arise, then, my brethren, let us detest sin, and let us prepare ourselves by zeal in prayer by the reception of the holy Sacraments to receive the Holy Ghost as the apostles received Him. Above all, if we would be worthy to entertain the divine Guest, let us be on our guard against dis-

pleasing Him. For, as the body cannot live without the soul, so the soul is dead to grace when the Holy Ghost dwells not within us. Hence, it would not avail us to have been living temples of the Holy Ghost, if we, instead of dying the death of the just, and of beholding in eternity the radiance of His glory, should die the death of the sinner, to sigh forevermore under the tyranny of Satan. Let us supplicate the Holy Ghost with the holy Church, that He may defend us from the snares of the devil, grant us true peace, and protect us against every evil, so that, under the guidance of His animating light, we may attain the eternal enjoyment of Him in the rest of the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

XXIX. The Love of God

The ingratitude of the Jews towards the Incarnate Son of God was of the basest type. They had received from Him many graces, many proofs of His love; they were convinced of His innocence and sanctity; but, blinded by their malice, they did not perceive that He was the Lord and Ruler of the Universe, the only begotten Son of God, otherwise, as St. Paul assures us, they would not have nailed Him to the ignominious cross (I. Cor. xxxii, 8). We, however, dear brethren, can proffer no excuse, if, illumined by faith and instructed by the Gospel, we requite the blessings of God by offending Him.

Charity is the noblest of all virtues. The love of God, above all things, is the first and foremost of the Divine Commandments and the fulfilment and the object of the whole law. Yet, how many Christians faithfully observe this Commandment? Let us consider this question, for the observance of this Commandment is the criterion of the true Christian. I will endeavor to show you that God is to be loved above all things, because He alone in Himself is deserving of our whole love, and that in order to love Him truly, our good works must keep pace with our love.

Man was created in order to love. The creative hand of the Almighty has implanted a heart in the human breast, so that love is a most potent instinct. "To suppose that there is a will which does not love is equivalent to seeking a will that will not live," says St. Augustine. "Not only am I not opposed to your allowing yourself to love," says he, "but I expressly desire that you should love; but take heed that your love be a worthy one, that it seek

nothing but the truly good, honorable, useful, and acceptable, a perfect possession; otherwise your heart will not be satisfied and contented." But where can this true, complete, perfect, good be found? Assuredly in nothing else but in God. He alone is the source, the first origin of every good—He is the abridgment of all perfections; from Him proceeds all true peace. He alone, therefore, must be the object of our love. Those only will be truly happy who love God, and the more ardently they love God the happier they will be.

Yet, how greatly in error many people are in this respect. Instead of loving the true good for which their hearts were created, they turn to empty pretense, to the false good which can bring them nothing but unhappiness and misery. Look at the miser. He thinks only of increasing his fortune. Behold the voluptuary, the proud; might not one suppose that the happiness which their hearts desire consisted solely in frivolities?

"O, blinded men," exclaimed the Royal Prophet, "how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?" Raise your mind and hearts on high. Earthly treasures are perishable, their beauty is deceiving. "Love rather a Kingdom that disappoints not, a beauty that is unchangeable and imperishable; love thy God, who alone can satisfy thy desires and longings, and who alone can bestow rest and happiness unto thy heart," so St. Augustine exhorts us.

How is it that God, who has loved you and still loves you so truly, has not succeeded in winning your love? Not content with giving you existence, He has made you a reasonable being, capable of knowing the truth, of willing that which is good, and of enjoying perfect bliss. He adorns your soul with His grace; He has sent His only Son to redeem you; He holds in readiness for you the

glory of heaven. Innumerable are the proofs of His love which He bestows upon you every day. It is God who gives you the air to breathe, who nourishes you with food, who delights your ears with music, your eyes with the verdure of the fields, the beauty of the flowers, the fertility of the earth.

Yet, we should love God not merely out of gratitude for His benefits, but because He Himself is infinitely worthy of our love. Our love should not be selfish nor servile, anticipating a glorious recompense from the Divine goodness. Alas, our hearts are so easily captivated by the deceitful charm of earthly things, they find such difficulty in loving God, who is infinite perfection and goodness; even the promise of His great reward and the hope of eternal happiness can scarcely move them to love.

The blissful intimate love of God, by which the soul is, as it were, immersed in the sweet ardor of Divine love, is the reward of the blessed in their heavenly home. Our love must be indicated by the sincere wish not to do anything contrary to His holy will. And do we love God at least in this manner? No, unfortunately, God is not loved even to that extent by many. He is not loved as a friend, nor for the sake of His reward. Material pleasures, trifling gain, worldly advantage, all receive our homage, and little thought is given to the greatest good, to the creator of all things.

If God were truly loved we should at once see the proofs. The inclinations of the heart are manifested by actions. A great deal is done for the vanities of the world; how much is done for the Almighty? God demands so little, and yet we seek excuses for refusing that little. "My household duties," this one says, "do not leave time for prayer." Penitential exercises—fasting—are shunned out of regard for "my health." Holy Mass on Sundays and holy days is often missed for trifling causes, and yet you say that you

love God? "You are speaking an untruth," St. Gregory tells us, "because works are the proof of love."

Even should the love of God require great effort, we have no right to complain or to evade the effort, because God is the infinite good, and loves us with infinite love. The saints, taught by their own experience, assure us that the love of God contains sweetness, delight, peace and fulness of content. The love of the world is attended with restlessness, endless anxieties, bitterness, and ceaseless vexations, which make life a wearisome burden.

Let us resolve, therefore, dear brethren, to faithfully fulfil the chief commandment of our holy religion. Let us love God with our whole heart, and obstacles will vanish, bitterness will give way to sweetness, restlessness will disappear, every difficulty will be overcome. But remember that you cannot truthfully say that you love God above all things, if you do not control—restrain—all earthly inclinations.

Blessed is he who truly loves God. In the observance of God's Commandments he merits heaven, and enjoys even here below in this wretched exile the sweetest peace of the Lord. Amen.

XXX. The Love of Our Neighbor

Our divine Saviour, when asked which was the greatest Commandment, joined the love of our neighbor to the love of God, saying: "'Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God,' He said, 'with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind.' This is the greatest and first Commandment. And the second is like to this: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'" Truly, He could not more forcefully express this Commandment. What, indeed, is more important or more necessary than to love God? And still, according to the word of Christ, it is no less important and necessary to love our neighbor. The one as well as the other is an important obligation, and as for the attainment of our salvation the love of God is absolutely necessary, so likewise is the love of our neighbor.

The love of God is the first Commandment, and the love of our neighbor the second, because we must love our neighbor on God's account, not God for the sake of our neighbor. These two commandments are so intimately joined one to another that they admit of no separation. We do not love God in reality, if we do not love our neighbor; nor can we truly love our neighbor if we do not love God.

Jesus Christ wished particularly to distinguish the Commandment by calling it His Commandment. Are then the other Commandments received from Him not His? Assuredly they are His; yet, He calls the commandment of brotherly love His Commandment in particular, in order to teach us that this one is the nearest to His Heart, and that He is especially insistent upon the observance of the same. Hence, the last exhortation given to the apostles before

His departure from this world has reference to this love. At the Last Supper He most impressively urged the love of one's neighbor.

Jesus Christ set forth this love as a distinguishing mark of being His disciple when He said: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." You may be pious, devout and God-fearing, yet remember, if you have not Christian charity, then you are not Christ's disciples; He will not consider you as such, nor will you be recognized as such by others. Christian charity alone is the unmistakable mark of a true Christian.

You see, then, the importance of Christian charity, and how strictly it obligates. We must come to the conclusion that if we would firmly establish the edifice of our sanctification, we must give Christian charity the rank which it holds in God's sight, and our progress in virtue must be measured according to it. Sins against charity must occasion us great uneasiness. In this respect we should examine ourselves rigidly, as there is hardly another moral precept so exposed to false judgment and prejudice as this one.

Easy as it is to find in the world a so-called charity, it is difficult to find there the truly Christian charity. For not all charity is Christian charity; much depends upon the motive whence it springs. There are two kinds of motives from which our affection for others may spring, natural and supernatural. Our motive is natural when we love our neighbor because of sympathy, natural inclination, gratitude, interest, relationship, on account of similarity of studies and tastes. Love from such motives is a purely natural love. It is not the one which constitutes Christian charity and which God enjoins upon us. I do by no means claim that it is forbidden to love our neighbor for natural reasons; it is reasonable that we should give our affection to those who do good to us, who are related to us by family ties, or who seem worthy of affection because of

admirable qualities and accomplishments. This love of itself is not meritorious for eternal salvation, because it is not in reality Christian charity; it is not a love which honors and glorifies the Lord, not a love which distinguishes us from the unbeliever. The heathen even may love his relatives and friends. What advantage and merit have we in this over him?

The Christian love is a love of our neighbor from supernatural causes; not, therefore, simply with regard to himself or to ourselves, but chiefly for God's sake. To love our neighbor for God's sake means to love him because God ordains it; because he is a creature of God; because he is the image of God, upon whom God Himself wished to impress His perfections and His likeness; because he is the object of the love of God, of His good pleasure, and dear to His Heart. To see a creature of God and an object of God's love in our neighbor is the motive for loving our neighbor after the will of God.

It is this exalted motive which bestows upon Christian charity its whole value; which distinguishes the love of the Christian from that of the world. God desires to be our debtor for anything that we do for our neighbor for the sake of this love, as if we had done it unto Himself, because He says: "Verily I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me."

Our Christian love must be universal and strong, and from these two characteristics you will be able to perceive whether your charity is truly Christian charity.

It must be universal, extending to all men without exception, embracing friends and enemies, saints and sinners. There is no human being who is not made by God, who is not His work and likeness. Hence, we can withhold our Christian affection from no one. If we exclude even one person from our affection, we have

not Christian charity. For, if it has God for its motive, there can be no such exception. Let your charity, therefore, be a universal one.

Our love must also be strong; it must overcome all obstacles, all difficulties. The love of our neighbor frequently encounters great difficulties, for the surmounting of which a natural motive would not be sufficient. Some persons bear malice toward us, others try to injure and persecute us. How can we love such people? In the natural order there is no motive sufficient for loving them. The supernatural motive of charity, however, helps us to overcome the difficulties. Say what you will of this or that person, he is your neighbor, God's creature, the likeness of God. His faults do not relieve us of the obligation of loving him for the sake of God. In such a case our charity is more meritorious and less subject to doubt. If we love our neighbor despite his faults, we give positive proof that we are not influenced by natural inclination, but solely through our love of God.

Let us, therefore, examine our hearts and see whether our charity corresponds to the Divine Commandment of love, in order to re-arrange and amend it, should it be faulty. For here is a question of an absolutely necessary virtue, if we are to be numbered among the ranks of God's children. Amen.

XXXI. The Commandments

In the same manner as the Apostles' Creed includes the chief articles of our faith, as in the Lord's Prayer is briefly contained all that we should hope for and ask of God, so do the Ten Commandments contain the chief rules for our conduct. The Ten Commandments form the foundation for all other precepts of the Church. Upon the observance of the Divine Law of the Ten Commandments depends our eternal salvation, as Jesus Christ has expressly declared. We read in the gospel that a young man turned to the Saviour and asked: "Master, what good shall I do, that I may have life everlasting?" and the Lord answered, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments." This is the indispensable condition for all who would enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Ten Commandments were given by God to the Israelites through Moses upon Mount Sinai. The first three of the Commandments contain our obligations toward God, the other seven our obligations toward our neighbor. Although this law was first announced several thousand years after the creation of man, we must not suppose that in the preceding centuries men lived without any law of God. From the first moment of man's creation the Lord gave to the spirit of man the faculty to distinguish between good and evil, between right and wrong. This is the so-called natural law which at all times has obliged mankind.

As long as man lived in innocence he recognized this law in his conscience and conformed to its precepts. When, however, sin entered into the world, and passions ruled, this natural light became

more and more obscured. In order to remedy the ignorance into which men had fallen, the Lord placed before them now in a visible manner written upon tablets of stone that law which they no longer discovered in their hearts, not because it was completely obliterated, but because, blinded by their passions, they no longer wanted to read it in their consciences. The Ten Commandments, therefore, are nothing but the law of nature, originally graven upon men's hearts, and now upon tablets of stone. It follows that the Ten Commandments had been obligatory from the very beginning of the world, long before their solemn proclamation, and they will remain obligatory without discrimination: for Christians, Mohammedans and pagans, although they may have no knowledge either of Moses or of Christ. For us as Christians, the observance of these Commandments is a much stricter duty than for others, because these Commandments have been renewed in a special manner by Jesus Christ in the Gospel.

From all this, dear brethren, you must understand what reverence we owe to so holy a law whose Author is God Himself, a law which God impressed upon the soul of man at his creation, then proclaimed solemnly upon Mount Sinai, and in confirmation of which Jesus Christ finally in His own person came to this earth. Because it is the law of God, the consequence is that this law is just and that its fulfilment is not above the power of man.

That this law is just is evident. If there is but one God, who is our sole and absolute Lord, we owe to Him alone our entire service, we must invoke His holy name with due veneration; there must be appointed days on which in a special manner we are to offer to Him a befitting veneration. This is the object of the first three Commandments. They oblige us to dedicate ourselves wholly to God, with all our thoughts, words, and actions.

That which contains our duties toward our neighbor is the subject of the remaining seven Commandments. What could be more just than to honor our parents? What more fair than not to wish our neighbor anything that we would not wish to happen to ourselves, therefore not to maltreat anyone, not to steal our neighbor's possessions, not to injure his good reputation? The Ten Commandments are really only the commandment of the love of God and of our neighbor.

As just as this law is, it is equally easy of execution. To doubt this would be blasphemy, for it would be accusing God of ignorance and injustice, if He would oblige us to do that which was impossible of our accomplishment. God is all wisdom, and when He enjoins something upon us, He requires only that what we can do with His assistance, which is given us if we duly ask for it. Our own natural strength does not suffice for the fulfilling of the Divine law, as Jesus Christ has expressly declared: "Without me you can do nothing," but our natural strength fortified by Divine grace can do all things required by the will of God. Then for us Christians the Divine law is not only practicable, but is also easier of fulfilment than for the Jewish people, for we not only have graces sufficient, but truly a superabundance of graces. When Jesus Christ came in order to declare and confirm the law, He also came as our Redeemer to merit for us greater graces and to facilitate for us its fulfilment. After the coming of the Son of God, His law assumed the name of the law of grace, of clemency and love, because Jesus Christ brought us from heaven such a plenitude of graces that He thereby made the observance of the law for us not only possible, but even easy and pleasant, by raising us from the unhappy state of the bondage of Satan, to the happy state of the adoption of children of God. Hence St. Paul assures us: "But if you are led

by the Spirit, you are not under the law." He means: "The grace of the Lord will make easy for you the observance of the law to such an extent that you will no longer feel its weight."

It is true, however, that the fulfilling of the law requires of us the renunciation of our natural inclinations; it demands that we make war upon our perverted natures, and do violence to ourselves, and for this reason Jesus Christ admonishes us to take His yoke upon our shoulders. But, at the same time, He tells us that this yoke is sweet, and this burden light, through the assistance of His grace, which sweetens all bitterness, surmounts all difficulties, makes all trouble light, and in and with us fulfils all the obligations of the Commandments imposed upon us by God. The law of God, therefore, is possible of accomplishment for everyone who is in earnest, and upon its fulfilment depends the attaining of eternal salvation for which we were created.

If you, then, dear brethren, would make sure of your eternal salvation, put your lives in accord with the law of God, your works with the precepts of the Divine law. If between your behavior and the Divine law you find a contradiction, you must busy yourself to remove the difficulty. The Apostle James tells us: "Now, whosoever shall keep the whole law, but offend in one point, is become guilty of all." A complete observance of the divine Commandments is indispensable. When with a good will you submit to the holy law of God, you will feel how its fulfilment becomes easier day by day. You will find His yoke sweet and filled with that heavenly unction with which God rewards the zeal of His servitors, and you will enjoy that profound peace, which, as the Psalmist says, is the portion of the zealous observers of the Divine law. Amen.

XXXII. The Church

The chief purpose of the descent of the Holy Ghost was to enlighten and strengthen the Apostles for the work of spreading the Church founded by Christ. This Church, now spread over the entire globe, was in its beginning limited to Jerusalem and its vicinity. But it quickly outgrew these limits, and was spread by the Apostles, and their successors, to the boundaries of the earth.

The Church was founded by Jesus Christ for the purpose of propounding and explaining to mankind the truths of salvation, and of safeguarding the faith against the danger of error. The Church is the unerring guide, and to her decisions we must submit in everything that concerns our faith and our soul's welfare. That there is needed in the world a guardian of the true religion is clear and evident; such an organization is in harmony with Divine Providence. For as there is a God, which is certain, so there must be a proper means to glorify and serve Him. And there must be a school wherein these means are taught, as well as a body of persons who practise these means, or this religion, in a visible manner. This school, this community, is called the Church, and those who are her members, who are instructed by her, are the faithful. As there is but one God, so, too, there can be but one true Religion, and, consequently, there can be but one Church. This only true Church is that to which divine Mercy has called us to belong. For our instruction and edification, let us consider what the Church is, and what are her chief attributes.

The word "Church" may be understood in a general and in a special sense. In the general sense, it is the union of all the faithful of all times, called to the knowledge of the true God, and united in a community of which Jesus Christ is the Head. In this meaning the Church embraces all times since the beginning of the world, because all the faithful of the Old as well as the New Testament have Jesus Christ for their Head. The just people of the Old Law believed in Him as the Messias, who was to come, and we believe in Him as the Redeemer, who has come. He is the Redeemer of all mankind before and after Him. While we may distinguish different epochs of time, yet faith, religion, the Church, were ever the same. The Church, embracing all times, includes, therefore, not only the faithful who live upon earth, but also those who have left this world in the state of grace. Hence the Church is divided into the Church triumphant, comprising the faithful who already reign with Christ in heaven; the suffering Church, consisting of the faithful souls still retained in Purgatory in order to atone for their sins; and, the Church militant, to which belong those faithful who are still pilgrims on earth and warring against the enemies of their salvation. These three divisions form one Church, because all have as their one Head Jesus Christ.

The Church in the special sense is the militant Church, the body of the faithful upon earth, to which we have the happiness of belonging. This is the union of all those baptized faithful, who profess the same faith, who receive the same Sacraments, and form a community under its lawful shepherds, of whom Christ is the invisible, and the Roman Pontiff the visible, head.

As the number of the faithful increased, the Apostles appointed priests and bishops to rule the faithful, subject to the leadership and supremacy of St. Peter as the head of the Church founded

by Jesus Christ. And as Peter could not stay always with the Church, so there was given him a successor equipped with the same prerogatives as visible head of the Church. And since St. Peter there has been an uninterrupted succession from Pope to Pope until these times, and this succession will be continued to the end of the world. Hence our holy Catholic Church is to-day, and will be until the end of the world, the same as it was founded by Jesus Christ, maintained through the uninterrupted succession of her shepherds, in the same faith and in the same Divine worship.

In order to be a member of this Church, three things are requisite: Baptism, profession of faith, submission to the lawful shepherds.

Baptism is requisite, because it is the Sacrament by which man enters the Church and is made a member of the same.

Furthermore, profession of the faith is required. For young children the infused virtue imparted to them in holy Baptism suffices. For all adults, however, there is required an explicit faith, which consists in the assent of reason and of the heart to the truths which the holy Church teaches and presents for our belief. Hence heretics and apostates, even though baptized, stand outside the body of the Church, the former because they refuse their assent to articles of faith, the latter because they have renounced the faith. Although they bear the ineffaceable character of Baptism, still they are separated from the Church by their voluntary unbelief.

Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge the supremacy of the lawful shepherds, because Jesus Christ established His Church like a well-organized State, in which a certain few are superiors, and the others their subordinates. Hence those who raise the banner of rebellion against the heads of the Church cease to belong to her.

Having considered the nature and the exterior organization of the Church, we will now briefly investigate the chief interior

faculties with which Jesus Christ has endowed the Church. They are stability and infallibility. The faculty of stability means that the Church can never cease to be, but will continue to the end of time, because Jesus Christ has promised that He will be with her always, to preserve and protect her. In the nineteen centuries since the Church was founded, many kingdoms and empires, many false religions, have been established and have perished. Everything created by mankind is subject to change and upheaval; the Church alone, as the work of God, will, according to the promise of her divine Founder, exist until the end of time. Violent persecutions of the Church never have been wanting, and never will be. The fury of heretics, the hatred of ungrateful children, have at all times waged determined battle against her, hell has hurled its poisoned darts against her, yet the Church has withstood all this onslaught; she will never be conquered, whereas those who assail this Kingdom of God will be shattered to destruction. The Church, through all combats and perils, will steadily pursue her course unto the end of the world.

The other interior faculty with which the Church has been endowed by her divine Founder is infallibility. Through this faculty she is in her teaching office preserved from error, in accordance with the promise of Christ that He would be with her always to enlighten and to teach her. And so it must be. For, if God obliges us, under pain of eternal damnation, to believe everything which He has revealed to us, and to do everything that He requires of us, then it is indispensably necessary that He should give us safe means to conform to His commands. He has done this by conferring upon the Church the supreme infallible teaching authority, in which we may confidently trust. By hearing the Church, we hear Jesus Christ himself. Again, the Saviour ordained

that those who will not listen to the teaching of the Church should be considered as heathens and public sinners. Consequently, it is our strict obligation to obey all her ordinances, to submit our will and reason to all her decrees, to maintain as true that which she presents to our belief, and carry out what she enjoins upon us to do.

Let us, then, thank the Lord for the priceless grace of having been admitted to His Church, the ark of salvation and of eternal life. How much do we not owe to this most tender and most solicitous of mothers! All the gifts of heavenly grace and Divine assistance descend upon us through her. How unfortunate are those who are not gathered in her bosom! Let us prove ourselves true and grateful children of the Church, and show her honor, obedience and affection, by duly esteeming her decrees, her priests and bishops. Let us obey the Church by accepting all her doctrines and instructions, by making them the pivot of our faith and life, by cheerful submission to her laws and precepts. Let us love the Church by making zealous efforts for her glorification, her exaltation and her triumph. Let us be proud of being members of Christ's Kingdom on earth, defend it against attack and slander, but especially let us show our loyalty by leading a truly Christian life according to the teachings of this holy Church, so that those not of our faith may be duly edified and inspired with esteem for our holy Religion. Amen.

XXXIII. The Marks of the True Church

I. Unity and Sanctity

The Prophet Isaias, in speaking of the Church of Jesus Christ, compares her to a large city, built upon the mountain, exposed to the gaze of all nations, as the harbinger of the truth. She is the fold, opened by the Redeemer unto all nations, and only in her are found the means of salvation. Jesus Christ alone can lead us to heaven, and He does this through the Church which He has founded. Only in this Church does He teach and instruct; in her alone He dispenses His graces and imparts His Spirit. Hence it was necessary that He should make His Church visible to all, enable all nations to recognize her, and to distinguish her from those false religions which also claim to have the true faith. The Church, as the true spouse of Christ, has been furnished by Him with such conspicuous marks, that she is plainly distinguishable. These significant marks which make known to us the true Church are: Oneness or unity, sanctity, universality or Catholicity, and Apostolic origin. These marks, we shall see, are found only in the Roman Catholic Church. To-day we shall give consideration to the first two of these marks.

Truth is essentially one, because there is but one God, and therefore the first essential mark of the true Church must be oneness, or unity. The Church can be the true one only if her faithful are united and joined to one another in such a way that they form but a single society, a single community, in the same way that stones are joined to make one single edifice. The divine Saviour prayed:

"Father, keep them in thy name, whom thou hast given me: that they may be one, as we also are. And not for them only do I pray, but for those also who, through their word, shall believe in me: that they also may be one in us" (John xvii, 11, 20, 21). It was Christ's intention, therefore, that the Church be but a single sheepfold, with only one shepherd, one family in which the members are dependent upon one head, a single body whose members are perfectly united together. This mark of unity is obviously found in our holy Church. There are in the world many individual communities, congregations, or parishes of Catholics. There are dioceses and archdioceses. But all these individual communities, all the faithful dispersed throughout the whole world, they all form but a single body, only one Church, through oneness of faith and doctrine, oneness of the Sacraments, oneness of the Supreme Head.

Faith and doctrine is the same of all members of the Catholic Church, however remote they may be from one another in locality or nationality. You may travel to any part of the world and wherever you will find Catholics you will find the same faith. The faith of the Catholics in Italy is the faith of the Catholics in the United States, as of those in England, Germany, France, Spain, Africa, Asia, Australia—everywhere. The same doctrines of faith are propounded to Catholics everywhere, the same faith is professed by every single member of the Catholic Church.

Oneness of the Sacraments is a second essential in the oneness of the Church. The same faith as regards the nature and number of the Sacraments is shared by all Catholics; the same Sacraments are dispensed and received among Catholics in all parts of the world. The same holy Baptism or regeneration in Christ everywhere, the same holy Confirmation everywhere, the same holy Eucharist everywhere, the same Sacrament of Penance everywhere,

the same other Sacraments everywhere. And what I have said of the Sacraments applies likewise to the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, to indulgences, to the veneration of the saints and of their relics and pictures, and to all Catholic doctrines. Everywhere there is among Catholics a perfect unanimity, uniformity, and harmony.

Finally, the Church of Christ is distinguished by the oneness of her head. All Catholics recognize one visible, supreme head, the Roman Pontiff, the successor of St. Peter. Every individual community is affiliated with the Church in Rome. Hence, our Church is called the Roman Catholic Church, by which name is understood the entire body of Catholics all over the world, who, although separated locally and by nationality, have for their head the Pope at Rome, and are all in communion with him.

From this union under one head follows the union of all members, the oneness in the community of Catholics. The faithful of a parish are united under their pastor; the faithful and parishes of a diocese are united under their bishop; the faithful of all the parishes of the world, of all the dioceses, are united under the Pope of Rome. It follows that although the flock of Christ is divided into parishes and dioceses, each of which has its special shepherd, yet one and all belong to the same fold, over which a single supreme shepherd rules, to whom all others are subordinate. Truly, there is represented in our holy Church a picture of perfect unity, and thus the first mark of the true Church of Christ is beyond doubt found in the Catholic Church.

The second mark of the true Church is sanctity. As the Church is the work of God, and God in all His works is sanctity itself, so the Church must partake of the sanctity of her founder. This characteristic mark is plainly possessed by our holy Church, which for many reasons is holy. She is holy in her invisible Head, who

is Jesus Christ, the origin and source of all sanctity. She is holy in her doctrines, all of which are related to the knowledge and worship of God. Holy she is in her commandments, which promote the sanctification of mankind. If her commandments were duly obeyed, then this earth, now so full of sin and unholiness, would be transformed into a holy place. She is holy, finally, in a large number of her members. To the sanctity of her doctrine she joins at the same time her efficiency, as a fruit of the grace of the Holy Ghost, to convert and sanctify souls. Hence it is that in her bosom there have at all times been holy persons, there are now, and ever will be such persons of the highest virtue, whose lives are patterned upon the Gospel, whose sanctity God has in many instances vouchsafed to reveal to the world through miracles.

It is true, alas, that amongst Catholics there are also such who lead sinful lives. But it is the nature of the Church here on earth to be composed of just and of sinners. Only in heaven, in the Church triumphant, are all members perfect. Here below, where mankind is in constant warfare against the devil, the Church must necessarily have some weak and erring members. Yet the Church does not cease to be holy on their account. In her motherly concern for the salvation of all men, the Church does not expel erring members, but tries to make them see the error of their ways, and to induce them to reform. Only malicious men will therefore censure the Church for the faults and sins of those who are Catholics only in name. If they are ungodly, it is because they do *not* live according to the teachings of the Church. The Church, far from condoning their conduct, censures the same severely, and she uses every possible means of bringing them back to the right path. Hence the Church is holy even though she has some members who are faithless to her commandments.

If the Catholic Church has the mark of truth, because she is one in doctrine and head, if she proves, furthermore, that she is God's work by being holy, then she must be the true Church of Christ. Let us therefore love her, obey her, and hold firmly all her doctrines, because only in the true Church can we find salvation. Amen.

XXXIV. The Marks of the True Church

II. Catholicity and Apostolic Origin

In our preceding instruction we learned that the true Church founded by Jesus Christ must be furnished with four conspicuous characteristics, rendering her easily recognizable, so that all may follow the teaching of Christ and be able to obtain salvation. These distinguishing marks of the true Church are, as we learned, Oneness, Sanctity, Catholicity and Apostolicity. As to the first two qualities, I have showed how the marks of oneness and sanctity are, without any doubt, possessed by our Church.

The true Church must also be Catholic, namely universal. As she is to be for all mankind the sole necessary means for the attainment of salvation, it is necessary that this means should exist at all times in the world and everywhere. Finally, she must be apostolic. For, as Jesus Christ founded His Church upon the Apostles, and commissioned them to spread the same in the world, thus Jesus Christ can only acknowledge as His Church that religious community which was established by His Apostles at His command. We shall see that also these attributes are found in the Church to which we belong.

The third characteristic of the true Church is that she is Catholic, or universal. Holy Scripture speaks of the Church under the image of a kingdom destined to spread itself throughout all parts of the world, and in which all men may find salvation, to attain the end for which they were created. In this regard, we know that the Catholic Church is not restricted to one place, to one province, to

one nation, but that she extends north, south, east and west, over the whole wide world. She distinguishes not between nations of believers and unbelievers. We find Catholics in Protestant nations, in heathen and Mohammedan countries, amongst the savages of the remotest parts of Africa, Asia and Oceanica, all united together by the bonds of the same faith and by participation in the same Sacraments. Therefore the title Catholic belongs by right to our Church, because she is spread throughout all parts, and embraces all periods. Our faith is the same as that of Abraham and the ancient patriarchs. They believed in the Redeemer that was to come, and we in the same Redeemer who has come. Christ is the cornerstone that joins together the faithful who were before Him, with those who came after Him, the Old Testament with the New, the prophets with the apostles. What more striking proof of the Catholicity of our Church could one ask?

The true Church must, finally, be apostolic; she must have been founded by the apostles, and must descend from the apostles and have their doctrine. Now all this is absolutely true of our Roman Catholic Church. The succession of her priests began with the apostles, and will continue so for all times. From our present Pope we can trace his predecessors in office to St. Peter, appointed by Jesus Christ Himself to be the head of His Church. And so can we trace the ordination and appointment of all Catholic bishops. The source of their authority is in each case a bishop ordained by one of the apostles, so that their office and authority were derived from the apostles.

Through this uninterrupted succession in the priesthood, the doctrine of the Church has been preserved unchanged from the apostles down to us. It suffices to compare what is taught to-day with what was taught in the early Church, and we shall find that

all articles of faith which we believe were also believed in the time of the apostles. The doctrine given by Jesus Christ to the apostles, and by the apostles proclaimed to all nations, is still professed by all Catholics. This most evident proof suffices in order to demonstrate that our holy Church is manifestly the Church that Jesus Christ founded, because she has preserved all the marks of her origin. If members of the early Church were to rise from the dead in these days, they would immediately recognize in our holy Church the Church in which they lived and believed.

Behold then, how the four marks, Oneness, Sanctity, Catholicity ond Apostolicity are found in our holy Church, and in her alone. The other so-called churches, standing in opposition to ours, cannot boast of the possession of these characteristics, and hence they are false religions.

There is still another sure mark by which we may recognize the true Church, that mark to which the divine Saviour referred when He foretold His apostles that they would become objects of constant persecution on the part of the world. Which is the religious community, that church, against which all others seem to have sworn an irreconcilable hatred, which the world persecutes with its jibes and calumnies, because she teaches the truth, and condemns error and vice? Where is the Church that wears a crown of thorns, a diadem of suffering? It is our Catholic Church. The sword of persecution is continually drawn against the Church of Rome. She must continually struggle in the heat of strife. She is the true Church of Christ, and all other religious communities are false, because truth is only one, and there can be only one true Church.

All these things which we have considered are well calculated to make comprehensible to us the priceless privilege of belonging to the Catholic Church, a blessing which we can never sufficiently

appreciate, a grace which has been imparted to us by the mercy of God without any merit whatever on our part. He who has the misfortune of being born and taught in a false religion, may turn to the true one, and many have done so. Yet it is extremely difficult to overcome the prejudices of training and education. Hence let us be most grateful to God for the precious gift of faith, and let us make use of it in the way He desires. Without this the blessing will be not only useless, but will merit for us greater punishment. What would it avail us, indeed, to be children of a holy Church, if we were to lead lives in contradiction to her teachings?

In order to be saved, it is therefore not sufficient to be born in and belong to the true Church. We must also profess her doctrines and arrange our manner of living according to her tenets. We must, by the righteousness of our moral lives, take part in the sanctity of the Church.

Along with the wheat in the fields grow the tares. But the mere fact of growing in a wheatfield does not save the useless tares from destruction. This is the comparison which Jesus Christ employed to explain to us the necessity of having merits. Both good and bad members are now found in the field of the Church, but a separation will be made by Christ on the day of judgment. Great will then be the despair of bad Catholics to see themselves cast with the unbelievers and godless, condemned to the flames of hell, which will be all the more severe for them as they had been favored by God with admission to the true Church.

May this thought, dear brethren, dwell in your memory as a strong incentive to correspond faithfully with the graces received, and to live in His Church as God would have you, namely as her loyal, obedient, and sanctified members. Amen.

XXXV. The Protestant Church Not the True One

We have seen how a religion which claims to be the Church established by Christ must be one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. She must be one because God is one; because the eternal truth, which is God, is one. Furthermore, the Church must be holy, because God is holy; He is Sanctity itself. The Church is His work, His Kingdom founded with His Blood; consequently, she must of necessity be holy. She must be Catholic, or universal, suited to all men and all times, because Jesus Christ instituted her for this end to lead all mankind to salvation. She must, finally, be apostolic, because Jesus Christ founded her in and upon the apostles, and in particular upon St. Peter as the head and Supreme leader of His Church, and because He ordained the apostles to proclaim and propagate His faith. I have shown you that these four marks are found in the Holy Roman Catholic Church, and that she consequently is the true Church of Christ. Now, if she is the true Church, she is of necessity the only true Church, because the truth is only one. All other religions are false religions.

That the faith of Mohammedans, of pagans and of Jews is false, needs no special proof, for that cannot be the true Church of Christ which does not even believe in Jesus Christ. But even those religions are false which, although bearing the name Christian, are separated in discipline and doctrine from our Roman Catholic Church, the only true Church. Such are the various Protestant Churches comprised generally under the name of Protestantism. All these religions lack the marks of the true Church of Christ.

The Protestant religions have not even a semblance of oneness.

They do not agree even in the most essential things. Martin Luther and Henry VIII. were the chief founders of Protestantism; very soon there was strife among their adherents. Zwingli and Calvin opposed and flatly contradicted each other, and they in their turn were assailed by their own followers. Some of their followers formed for themselves new articles of faith according to their taste. Thus Protestantism has been divided into a vast number of different sects, at variance one with the other, one condemning what the other teaches.

And so it is to this day. In our own country we have seen that among Protestants creeds spring up like mushrooms. Frivolous and conceited brains have imagined themselves called by God to be reformers and founders of new religions. Protestants proclaim the Bible as the sole source of faith. But they have no supreme teaching office to explain the Bible infallibly; instead of that each Protestant claims to right to interpret the Bible according to his understanding. Hence there are almost as many opinions and interpretations as there are brains. Do we find here even a trace of oneness and unity? Upon one point only are Protestants unanimous, and that is their condemnation of the Catholic Church. And necessarily so. Because as error contradicts and assails truth, so these false religions conspire against the true Church.

Protestants teach, for instance, that it suffices for salvation to have faith, and that the members are not required to sanctify themselves by good works. Thus they deny the necessity of holiness in their members. They abhor the veneration and invocation of the saints. They reject prayers for the departed, and thus deny the Communion of saints.

Protestantism, furthermore, does not possess the mark of Catholicity, or universality, in respect to time and place. There

were no Protestants in the centuries before the so-called Reformation. For fifteen centuries after the coming of Christ no one even knew of the doctrines of Protestantism. Consequently, Protestantism does not possess the mark of universality in respect to time. But can she call herself universal as regards place? Hardly, if it be remembered that almost every Protestant nation has its own tenets and its own supreme head.

No need in mentioning that Protestantism cannot be apostolic. Its founders — Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Henry VIII. — appeared fifteen centuries after the apostles; their doctrine is not that of the apostles, but the work of these various founders; it is ever changing and alters as the mood of their followers dictates. It has been changed, in matter and form, according to the whim of some potentate; it has been forced to accommodate itself to political transformations or influences. A testimonial to anything else rather than to an apostolic origin.

Thus it is seen that Protestantism, consisting of an almost countless number of sects, has not the characteristics of the true Church of Christ, and consequently it is a false religion.

True, there are many Protestants who live righteous and god-fearing lives. They are brought up in their faith and believe it to be the true one. God, in His infinite mercy, will reward them for their good deeds. But that does not change the fact that theirs is a false religion, and they cannot be saved if they realize this fact and yet neglect to embrace the true Catholic faith. Let us include them in our prayers that the Lord may enlighten and guide them. Amen.

XXXVI. Keeping Holy the Sabbath

All days belong to the Lord and must, in a general way, be dedicated to the honor and glory of God. Yet, as our life is beset with cares for the maintenance of the body, it would on that account be impossible to direct our thoughts to God at all times; therefore the Lord has set aside certain special days to be observed by special religious acts. And, although we are obliged to worship God every day of our lives, this obligation binds in a special manner on Sundays and holidays of obligation.

This commandment of the sanctification of Sundays and holidays is a natural law as well as a Divine law. That we should devote some time to God to acknowledge Him by special worship as our supreme Lord, our reason tells us. Hence, we see that all nations, even those uncivilized and ignorant, and however they may differ in belief, are all in accord in the matter of devoting appointed days to the special service of the Supreme Being.

The appointment of such special days has been made by God and also by the Church. In the Old Law the Sabbath was the day of the Lord. In the New Law, the apostles, by virtue of the authority given them by God, caused the Sunday to take its place in commemoration of the two great mysteries accomplished on this day—the resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Holy Ghost. Furthermore, under the Old Law there were, at the special behest of God, other days dedicated to His service, and so there are also for us, besides the Sundays, other feast days appointed to celebrate

the remembrance of certain mysteries of our holy religion, and also to honor the Blessed Virgin and other saints. Let us consider to-day in what manner we ought to observe the Sundays and holidays, and at the same time it will be my duty to refer to the unholy use to which these days are put by many Christians.

To keep holy the Sundays we must, first of all, refrain from all works which interfere with Divine service.

Consequently, it behooves us to devote ourselves to those exercises of piety in which, to a great extent, the service of God consists, and that is the chief aim and purpose of the Commandment. It suffices not, for the hallowing of the Sunday, to refrain from every servile work if we would spend our leisure in idleness and sloth. It is not for the sake of idleness that abstinence from work is required of us on Sundays. For by this God is not glorified. The rest from work which He ordains has for its chief object His glory and the furthering of our soul's welfare. Hence, we must devote some time to the practise of works which correspond to this twofold purpose. What are these works?

The first and foremost of them, one to which every Catholic is strictly obliged by the commandment of the Church, consists in devout attendance at holy Mass. It is even a grievous sin to miss a considerable part of holy Mass. I said a *devout* attendance, for those who have their thoughts elsewhere, who even disturb the devotion of others by frivolous behavior and irreverent demeanor, do not comply with this commandment.

Again, the hearing of holy Mass with befitting attention and devotion is not all that we should do in keeping holy the Sunday. A considerable part of this divinely appointed day should be spent in works of piety. For this day belongs to God, because He has reserved the same to Himself. These other works of piety to which

we ought to devote a considerable part of each Sunday, are entrusted to our sense of duty, and they are left to our own choice, so that each one may determine that which will be of greatest spiritual advantage to him and contribute most to the glory of God. I will name a few holy works for you, such as are most warmly recommended by the Church.

Prayer, and especially the acts of faith, hope and charity, are an admirable means for the sanctification of Sundays and holidays. This was the favorite exercise of the early Christians. Prayer is the most appropriate means of praising and glorifying God, and, at the same time, the most effective for obtaining Divine assistance, to preserve ourselves in the state of grace and of Divine friendship.

However inspiring and efficacious oral common prayer is, let us never neglect interior prayer, which can be practised even when performing the necessary duties of our daily life. Engage your thoughts with the consideration of the eternal truths, the last things, and the Divine mysteries. Ponder especially over the certainty of your death, the hour of which is uncertain. Reflect seriously whether the life you are now leading is such as to lead you to a life eternal in heaven, and should you find yourself upon evil ways, hesitate not to retrace your steps. Contemplate the Divine mysteries, the Infinite goodness of the divine Father, who, at sight of the misery to which sin has brought us, sent His only begotten Son upon this earth. Dwell in your thought upon the Infinite love of our divine Saviour, who for us poor sinners, and for our eternal salvation, became Incarnate, who willed to be born in extreme poverty and abasement in order to teach us to despise worldly possessions, and who for love of us subjected Himself to the most agonizing and bitter passion, and to the most ignominious death.

The blessings which you have received from God open a wide field for contemplation in your leisure time on Sundays, in uplifting your heart in loving gratitude to God. What an abundance of graces and gifts have we received from Divine mercy, without any merit of our own. If not able to give thought to this at other times, manifest at least on Sundays your sincere and heartfelt acknowledgment to the Lord by humble thanksgiving and praise.

Fail not to assist at the sermon. Be present at benediction. The hearing of the divine Word is necessary for Christians who would attain salvation, and neglect of the same is a source of lukewarmness—it is the cause why so many Catholics lead indifferent lives.

On Sundays we should, in an especial way, examine our consciences, and call to mind how we may have offended God, in order to atone for our trespasses before God, and to beg Him for forgiveness. Sunday, again, is the day to approach the Lord's Table to receive the Bread of angels, the Food of eternal life.

Works of mercy and of charity toward our fellow beings are a holy occupation for Sundays. Our love of our neighbor is the touchstone of our love of God; it ought not to remain shut up in our hearts but be made known through works of charity. Strive to care for your neighbor to the best of your ability, for his body as well as what concerns his soul. Visit the sick and assist them in a genuine Christian manner, console them in their affliction, strengthen them in their weakness, try and bring back to the path of righteousness those who have erred, using due prudence, and do all this in a spirit of true charity, so that the Lord may be honored and glorified evermore.

If you employ your Sundays in holy exercises such as these, then you may say in all truth that you are faithful to the third Commandment of God, which enjoins upon us that duty, and you

will receive superabundant blessing, as the Lord Himself has promised (Deut. xxviii, 3, etc.). But wo to him who desecrates the Sabbath. He calls down upon himself the wrath and chastisement of God, because in irreverence and ungratefulness he ignores and scorns the Lord of earth and heaven, the Creator of all things, the Dispenser of all graces and benefits for body and soul alike. Amen.

XXXVII. The Desecration of the Sabbath

The prohibition of servile work on Sunday is due to the command that this day be devoted to the practise of piety and the worship of God. Since God has reserved this day to Himself in a special manner, we must employ it in a greater degree than other days in acts of praising and glorifying Him, and we should make use of this, the Lord's day, with greater zeal for the sanctification of our souls. But what a contradiction do we often perceive between the Commandment of God and the conduct of so many Christians! With many people there is actually no time in which God is more dishonored than just on Sundays; no other days are so profaned as the day of the Lord. This sacred day seems to be reserved by many for sin and dissipation. For them the Lord's day has become the devil's day. Let us direct our attention to-day to this unhallowed state of affairs in order to understand its depravity and to keep ourselves free from it.

The three capital sins which, more than any others, devastate Christianity, are pride, impurity, and the love of gain. And there is no time in which these three sins are committed with more audacity than on Sundays. Vanity, extravagance, haughtiness, make their great display on this day, even in our churches. It is far from my intention to censure the desire of men and women to dress in their best on this day of rest and worship. But if this desire turns into vanity, conceit and scorn of others, if God and prayer are forgotten over the thought of clothes and looks, grave sin is committed; and if the time in church is spent in such vainglory,

your churchgoing, instead of being pleasing to God, becomes offensive to Him.

I pass over to the second of the sins which dominate the world, and that sin is impurity. With brazen shamelessness this vice makes its appearance even on Sundays. This day which should be especially a time for the display and exercise of virtue, is for many a day of license and vice. Harmful associations between young people of the opposite sex, frivolous love affairs, take up the time that should be given to acts of piety and virtue. And wo to the parents, who, persuaded by satan, close their eyes to the license of their children, to associations and opportunities that will poison their mind and soul as surely as the deadly snake-bite poisons the body.

Others, again, pass their Sundays in gambling, in scandalous conversation, in slander, in carousing and drunkenness. On that one day some men squander almost their entire wages, to the deprivation of their children, and to the grief of their wives. Is that keeping holy the Sabbath day? Is it not rather reviling it? One might almost suppose that dissipation of every description were especially ordained on this sacred day!

The third of the vices which especially desecrates the Sabbath is the morbid love of gain. This greed is so deeply implanted in the hearts of certain persons that they take no heed of the law of God. Instead of concerning themselves with the service of God and the sanctification of their souls, they attend unnecessarily to their business interests; their thoughts and actions are engaged in worldly affairs, rather than in the affairs of their salvation.

In this manner, also, do they sin who make their children, servants, or employees work without necessity on Sundays, who even deprive them of the opportunity to hear Mass.

Dear brethren, remember that this is the day devoted to God.

Beware of vain display, of license, of dissipation; occupy yourselves with God's service, with works of Christian piety, with the sanctification of your soul. Let your work rest, and confide in the Lord. He will pour out His blessings upon your other days. He knows how to compensate you in a thousand different ways for any slight loss which you may suffer for His sake on Sundays; and, what is far more important, He will enrich you with imperishable treasures, treasures that will not decay or rust, treasures that you will take with you, when, on departing this life, you will leave everything else behind. Amen.

XXXVIII. Blasphemy and Cursing

Of all sins committed in this world we can think of none more enormous and more dreadful than blasphemy and cursing. The reason for the extreme gravity of blasphemy consists in the fact that the blasphemer assaults God Himself, indeed, would destroy Him if it were possible. It is true that God is dishonored by everyone who trespasses against a Divine law; but while other sins are violating the *ordinances* of God, the blasphemer violates God directly in His Person.

Who, indeed, is the man who presumes to revile the supreme, infinite Majesty of God? A creature who, compared to God, is a mere nothing, a little dust and no more, frail and perishable as the reed of the fields. And this miserable creature has the presumption to blaspheme and to deride God Almighty, the compass of all immensity and of all virtue, before Whom even the Seraphim of heaven tremble with awe. Can there be anything more dreadful and impious? This man who has the audacity to blaspheme God, is a creature of God, and by God gifted with innumerable blessings of body and soul. He has been redeemed by the Son of God at the price of His sacred Blood. And this man, this Christian, has the temerity to blaspheme His Lord and God who has been so loving and gracious towards him. What shame, what ingratitude, what infidelity!

Since blasphemy is so dreadful and hideous a sin, the person who commits it must be animated with most malicious sentiments. The blasphemer joins hands with the devils and the damned in hell. The

Book of the Apocalypse describes hell as a pool of fire, where the torments of the damned are so violent and so excruciating that they are beside themselves with despair and rage, and where they pass their time uttering frightful blasphemies against God and Divine justice. Blasphemy is the occupation of the devil and of the damned in hell. Blasphemy is, therefore, a sin of the devil, and blasphemers bear upon their tongues the language of hell, and the badge of their own eternal damnation. They accustom themselves in advance to that vile language which they will carry on throughout eternity, in union with the damned and the devil!

The horrible malice of blasphemy of man surpasses even the malice of the devil's blasphemies and of the damned in hell. They blaspheme God in their torments, in the terrible chastisements of God's avenging justice. Men, however, blaspheme the infinite Majesty of God at the very time when they are enjoying His numberless blessings.

And for this awful sin, which renders those who commit it like unto the devil, blasphemers will even offer excuses. They claim that they have not the intention of offering God so great an insult, that they only use their execrable language in order to make their talk emphatic and impressive upon those to whom the words are addressed; that they blaspheme from habit, without reflection, and under provocation. What foolishness! Can excuses such as these justify the sin of reviling God?

Again, some say they have become accustomed to blaspheming and cursing, and that they do it without giving it a thought. This frightful habit must positively be put aside, at all costs; otherwise there is no hope of eternal salvation. It would certainly be a useless excuse for a burglar, or a murderer, to tell his judge that he should not be punished because stealing and murdering was a habit with

him. The judge would rightly answer: "If that is so, you are even more deserving of punishment." And has the blasphemer the presumption to expect that he will escape the punishment of hell because he has the habit of blaspheming and cursing?

Others say it is anger that drives them to blasphemy, their blood rises—they feel driven to it. If you lose at play, if a fractious child does something wrong, if a beast of burden does not go fast enough, if you have suffered an affront or an injustice, are these things reasons for reviling God? No, this excuse will not avail you before the awful tribunal of God. Violent anger and passion are of themselves grave sins, and you must see how foolish it is to try and excuse one sin by another.

God has demonstrated the abomination of this sin in various ways. In the Old Testament He ordained that blasphemers be punished by stoning to death. If the Lord does not in our days visit such public penalties upon offenders, there are other secret punishments which will be visited all the more heavily upon blasphemers.

Beware, therefore, of the abominable vice of blaspheming and cursing, and in order to be free of it, destroy the roots of this vice. One of these roots is anger. Passion must be held in check and suppressed. Another root is intemperance in drink, which truly makes of man a beast. Another source of blasphemy is impatience in the trials of life, and in the unpleasantnesses we encounter. Practise resignation to the decrees of Divine Providence, which always promote our real welfare. God is patient, indulgent and forbearing, but there will come a time of reckoning, when He will reveal Himself as the avenger of all evil. Wo to those who, by their own language, betray themselves as the accomplices of satan in reviling God. Amen.

XXXIX. Duties of Parents Toward Their Children

It is needless to dwell on the plain fact that parents are in duty bound to support, educate, and care for their children according to their state of life and means. This applies to their bodily needs. But a child has also a soul. If, therefore, parents are obliged to care for children as regards their corporal wellbeing, they are all the more obliged to care for their soul, which is incomparably more precious than the body. If a parent refuse to support his child, if he is not concerned in the little one's needs, allowing him to starve and perish, he is regarded as a monster. What are we to think, then, of those who neglect to care for their children's soul, who let them perish, who are even accessory to their destruction? But are there such Christian parents? Alas, there are, and many of them.

Parents are obliged by God to instruct their children in their religion, or to have them instructed, to teach them to know Jesus Christ, to correct their faults, to suppress evil inclinations, to lead them in the path of virtue, and, to give them good example. Are these obligations fulfilled by all parents?

I ask you, parents, do *you* give your children the food which they need for their souls? Do *you* instruct them in the truths of our faith? And that does not merely mean a senseless drill in the words of the Catechism, and reciting with them a few prayers which they possibly do not understand, and which you do not take the pains to make intelligible to them. I will be silent as to those parents who neglect even this trifle. Do you teach them to know God, do you tell them what He has done for us and still does, our duties

towards Him, the purpose for which we were placed in this world, the eternity which awaits us, the reward promised to the good, and the chastisement which will come to the ungodly? Do you teach them to know Jesus Christ, and what He has done for us, and what we must do in order to correspond to His love? Do you teach them the fear of God, confidence in God, resignation in His divine Will, patience, avoidance of sin, charity towards our neighbor? Do you teach them reverence for and obedience to the Church, the sure guide to our eternal salvation? You, fathers and mothers, will one day be called upon to render strict account to God for the souls of your children, and wo to you if for lack of this Christian instruction they have miserably perished!

Another duty of parents consists in admonishing their children, and in chastising them for faults when necessary. Many parents are just as wanting in this duty as in the other. Many, from a false love, pass over everything their children do; they give way to their caprices, with the excuse that the children are still young and will become more sensible and better as they grow older. Reason, no doubt, comes with age. But the sinful habits and evil inclinations which are not suppressed in childhood, wax stronger with years; they strike deeper root and become even stronger than reason. As long as the tree is small and pliable it may be bent at will; but after it grows up you cannot make it take another direction than the one it has taken.

Others punish and chastise their children from anger and passion; curses and even blasphemies form their reprimands. They do not chastise but maltreat; they do not conduct themselves as parents but as furies and maniacs. They claim that they cannot chastise unless angry. As if it were necessary for the fulfilling of the obligation to correct children to make light of every other obligation

toward God. What is the consequence? The consequence is simply that your children no longer fear *you*. but the whip and your ferocious language. They are not concerned about displeasing you, but only afraid of a beating, and there will come a time when they will outgrow the whip. What then?

Parents who reprimand their children and punish them purely from sentiments of true affection and religious duty, will begin with a gentle reproof. Then, if children are still intractable and stubborn, they speak sternly, yet without anger. They are determined, but not harsh; severe, but not revengeful; they grasp the rod not in savage rage. "My child," they will say, "I am chastising you because you have deserved it. Since you have done wrong, it is just that you bear the punishment. Because I love you I have need of the rod, so that by amending your shortcomings you may become better behaved and will shun this fault hereafter."

Happy the children whose parents talk thus to them! Pity the children who are reprimanded in anger and wrath with curses and blasphemies. Whilst seeking to cure them of one fault, their parents teach them others, and worse ones, by their bad examples. The bad example of parents causes more injury to children than can ever be made good by reprimands and chastisements. If you, fathers, are impatient, revengful, untruthful, intemperate, little good it will do to reprimand and punish your children for their faults. Your example will do more harm than your corrections will do good. And you, mothers, all your exhortations and scoldings will be wasted if you are deficient in your duties, if your behavior is not in accordance with the love of God and with charity towards others.

If then you, fathers and mothers, come complaining that your children are self-willed, disobedient, untruthful, that they are overbearing, cruel or lazy, ask yourselves if they are not walking in the

way that you have shown them, if they are not doing what they have seen you do. They ignore your good advice and are following your bad example. They behold your ways of acting, they imitate you and become like unto you. And if they have faults which you have not and never had, you have been negligent in instructing and reprimanding them.

Think well on this, parents! The salvation of your children and your own go hand in hand. If you assure theirs, then you will place your own in security. If, on the contrary, you are the cause of their ruin, then at God's tribunal they will be your accusers.

But God does not wait for the next life in order to reward or punish you in your children. Even in the present life He will let you reap the fruits which correspond to the good or bad training which you have given your children. If a good training is given, then you will reap the sweet fruits of consolation and of joy, temporal happiness and earthly blessing, which God will bestow upon you, especially by the faithful gratitude which you yourselves will experience in your children. The fear of God with which you have inspired them will reflect upon yourselves, and they will never be lacking toward you in veneration, help, assistance, or in filial gratitude. But if their upbringing has been bad, you will quickly reap the bitter fruits of sorrow and anguish from their reckless and bad conduct, the necessary consequences of which are dishonor, disgrace, squandering of income, impoverishing of the family, and often contempt, neglect and bad treatment of your own person. Parents, the choice is open to you! Choose, for your own and your children's welfare. Amen.

XL. On Impurity

St. Paul warns us that the vice of impurity, on account of its particular infectiousness, ought not even be mentioned amongst Christians. Nevertheless, the prevalence of this vice makes it incumbent upon the preacher to speak about it. It is a vice which has its seat in our degenerate body, corrupted by original sin, and hence it is found amongst all ages, sexes and walks of life. Its devastations are so great that in the opinions of theologians it thrusts more souls into hell than all the other vices combined.

What is impurity? It is the sinful attachment to sensual pleasures, contrary to Christian chastity, the abandonment of mind and body to animal passion and lust.

In spite of the enormity of this vice, those addicted to it seek to excuse their evil hankering by claiming that it is a natural instinct, and as such not of serious moment. Impurity no grave sin? Think of the terrible flood by which the Lord caused the destruction of the world "as all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth"; remember the awful fate of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha! The Lord knows the weakness and frailty of human nature, but He did not desist from exterminating the impure in this frightful manner.

Man should possess his body in sanctification and honor. We should be properly impressed with the importance of this obligation and be made conscious of the extraordinary gravity of the sin of impurity. We have the happiness of being Christians. In the sacred waters of baptism we became members of Christ's Church. In the holy Eucharist we have received the Body and Blood of Jesus. He

has united Himself so intimately with us that our body belongs to Him more than it does to us. In holy Baptism and Confirmation the Holy Ghost descended into our hearts, and we are His living temples. How, indeed, can the reviling of a body thus sanctified be regarded as a lesser sin!

The sin of impurity is, on the contrary, of extraordinary gravity, to such an extent, indeed, that even the smallest voluntary act of impurity, however trifling it may seem, is a mortal sin. It is a sin which Holy Writ and the Fathers stigmatise with strong expressions like: Pestilential sin, filth of sin, degrading passion, abomination, the most infamous of sins, etc. Nature itself revolts at this sin. There is no sin that seeks, as this does, to conceal itself from a natural feeling of shame, to withdraw itself from the gaze of men.

Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God; but wretched are they who give themselves up to impurity, because the spirit of impurity is accompanied by many other evil spirits, who entail upon the unhappy slaves of impurity confusion of spirit and pangs of conscience.

The vice of impurity, generally designated by the name "uncleanness," subjects mankind to the yoke of sin at all times and under all conditions. Other sins are sins either of the mind, as pride and ambition; or of the heart, as hatred and envy; or of the palate, as gluttony and drunkenness. Impurity, however, takes possession of the entire man, corrupts and poisons him inwardly and outwardly—it is a universal sin. Inwardly it fills the reason with shameful thoughts and intentions, the imagination with filthy pictures and representations, the memory with nasty reminiscences, the will with evil desires and delight in unclean things. This vice defiles the eyes; it pollutes the lips. It defiles the ears, it defiles, indeed, all senses—the whole body. The unfortunate person who lets himself be swayed by

the vice of impurity has but one thought left, one inclination, one language, one single endeavor and desire, and that is filth and obscenity.

And is there any crime to which impurity does not drive its slaves? This passion, as soon as it takes possession of one, is the most active and most violent of all, and controls mankind to such an extent that it impels to every crime. The violence of this passion is so great that it seeks its satisfaction despite all obstacles; it grasps at every means that offers gratification, and thus it has an unlimited number of sins in its train. It is the cause of seducing and leading astray innocent and God-fearing persons; of the instilling of infamous principles; of the spreading of impious and immoral books; of licentious propositions. It leads to sins of calumny, perjury, hypocrisy—even of sacrilege. It leads to crimes to overcome the obstacles that may oppose the satisfying of unbridled desires. As a result there follow quarrels, violence—even murder. And even where such dire consequences are lacking, this vice generates hate, bitter strife, implacable enmities, public scandals—in brief, endless discord and harm, and, physically, it is the cause of loss of health and an early death.

For this reason, we cannot marvel that this vice sets up ruin and desolation in the soul, that it leads quickly to blindness of the spirit, to aversion for things Divine, to unbelief, despair and impenitence. Yes, to impenitence upon the deathbed, because there is no sin that corrupts and hardens the heart more than impurity. With the fire of this powerful passion enkindled in the heart, the principles of our holy religion no longer form the standard of life, because the animal man, as the apostle says, has no relish for Divine things. He is no longer solicitous about his soul and eternal happiness. If he still goes to the Sacraments, he does so half-heartedly, perhaps only to

conceal his shameful life and out of regard for public opinion. In Confession he, perhaps, conceals this shameful sin and thus commits sacrilege unto the end. Finally, on his deathbed, he looks back upon a life filled with impurity and debaucheries, upon sacrilegious Confessions and Communions, and from where shall hope come to him? True, the greatest of sinners may hope for the mercy of God, but a glance at such a past is more likely to arouse despair than hope.

Still, we must not draw the conclusion that this deplorable infirmity is incurable. No, dear brethren, if one has the sincere desire to be cured and will honestly submit to the counsel of his spiritual physician, his confessor, a cure is possible. But it is necessary to go at it in great seriousness and zeal. For though this evil is not incurable, yet it is of such a dangerous nature that it requires most decisive and vigilant treatment and a firm and determined will to suppress it. Amen.

XLI. How to Combat Impurity

Although the vice of impurity, so disastrous in its consequences, is far more difficult to cure than any other, we must not regard it as entirely incurable, no matter what foothold it may have gained, provided, one realizes thoroughly the necessity of rooting it from the soul by submitting to the proper spiritual treatment. There is a saying that where there is a will there is a way, and to those who have the firm will I will point out the way.

To the unchaste there apply the words of our divine Saviour Jesus Christ: "But this kind of devil is not cast out but by prayer and fasting." Here is the remedy prescribed by our supreme spiritual physician Himself: Prayer and fasting. And by fasting there should not only be understood restriction in bodily nourishment, although this is always useful and sometimes necessary, but in general every exercise of self-mortification.

The chief remedy against impurity is prayer, that most necessary remedy against all evils, but especially against this vice which, because so extraordinarily stubborn, is so difficult to cure. Chastity is a Divine gift; it must come from above; therefore the necessity of persevering in prayer for this gift. Though the devil of impurity may hold spirit and will in bondage, he must leave the voice free to call upon God. Pray, therefore, if the unclean passion makes its assault upon you. Redouble in such moments your cry for help to the divine Heart. Cast yourself at the feet of Christ. Put before your Saviour the profound misery of your soul, ransomed by Him at so great a price; point out to Him your weakness and

frailty, the power of bad habits, the violence of evil desires, and implore Him urgently to grant you His powerful assistance in your great need, and be assured that God will grant you the same and lead you to victory. I would particularly remind you of the advantages of daily meditation, or interior prayer, of which I have already spoken in an earlier instruction, and of which St. Theresa says: "A quarter of an hour daily of interior prayer, and heaven is yours."

But some will object that this vice has, among other disastrous effects, also that of making every exercise of piety distasteful; that, therefore, prayer is not easily resorted to by such sinners. No doubt this is true, but just on that account I say strive your utmost to overcome this disgust, this aversion, which is a consequence of this vice, and, if necessary, begin your effort by beseeching God to remove from you that peculiar spiritual sloth that has come upon you, and to awaken in you the consciousness of your great peril of eternal ruin toward which you are hastening. For as soon as this peril is thoroughly realized you will desire to be liberated, and this desire will both urge and teach you to pray fervently. If the sinner, however, prays with the lips only, not with the heart, without a lively desire of being heard, perhaps even with a certain fear of being heard (St. Augustine confesses that he implored God for deliverance from his bad habits, and even in uttering the prayer was afraid of being deprived of these habits, because his heart was set upon them), if he tires of prayer, then he has no right to plead inability to overcome this vice.

Prayer, furthermore, will remain unfruitful, if you are not careful to keep far from you and avoid everything that will lead to impurity. To implore God to deliver you from impurity, and then to seek or, at least, not to avoid the occasion is a contradiction and a great presumption. The Lord warns us in Holy Writ that he who

loves the danger shall perish in it. It is necessary, therefore, not only to persevere in prayer, but also to exercise mortification, by keeping at a distance all that which is likely to excite the passions, and by employing means that will weaken and smother them.

The allurements of this terrible passion are numerous. I will not speak here of the so-called near occasions, such as frivolous love affairs, ribald company, the perusal of immoral books, and so on, because these are things which must be shunned under all conditions. I have in mind things that, although they cannot be called near occasions, yet easily lead to this sin.

The chief inducement for evil desires and impurity is spiritual sloth. The Holy Ghost tells us that idleness hath taught much evil. An idle person is easily led to sin. We must therefore seek proper occupation, so that the mind may have no time for evil thoughts. Another inducement is intemperance in food and drink. A person fond of the pleasures of the palate is much beset by temptations to impurity and easily succumbs to them. This vice has its seat in the flesh, and the flesh is all the more fractious and rebellious, the more luxuriously it is nourished and coddled. Abstinence, therefore, and sobriety are necessary to keep sensuality away. Young people must be warned in particular against dances, parties, and other gatherings that take place without the presence of the parents. There is great danger in the frequent and free association with persons of the opposite sex, without necessity or propriety, only for the sake of fun and frolic.

The Holy Ghost warns us that death enters through the eyes, the windows of our souls. We must therefore be vigilant in this regard and guard our eyes.

I cannot refrain from mentioning still another danger, and that

is negligence and tardiness in opposing temptations. If not immediately repelled, they will in the end conquer. Hence, be ready at the very first beginning to rout evil suggestions. Negligence strengthens the temptation and enfeebles resistance.

But even the employment of all these precautions is not sufficient. The enemy is in us; it is our own body and mind. It is not sufficient to defend ourselves against exterior enemies. We must battle against our own flesh by fasting and abstinence, penance and mortification. Holy purity is a lily that only flourishes among the thorns of mortification. Practise, therefore, mortification and penance; make use of the chief means of protection against this sin: namely, frequent and worthy reception of the holy Sacraments, frequent consideration of the eternal truths, and, in particular, of the last four things. If we had the last things at all times before our eyes and reflected seriously upon them, the fear of God would extinguish within us all concupiscence. Finally, the practise of a very special and fervent veneration of the crucified Saviour and of His sorrowful Mother, the Mother of Purity, is a powerful remedy against this vice.

These are the means to protect us against impurity. If they are employed conscientiously and perseveringly, this vice, no matter how deep-rooted, will lose its power. It is a fact, however, that this vice is of such fascination and power over those addicted to it, that few have really an earnest desire to reform, and where the earnest will to reform is lacking there is, of course, no hope for such a sinner.

Jesus Christ asked the paralytic: "Wilt thou be made whole?" And so I ask such sinners: do you really want to be cured? There is salvation for you if you really desire it. Make use of the proper means; arm yourselves with courage and firm resolve. It is a

question of your eternal weal or wo, everything is at a stake. If you faithfully co-operate with Divine grace, then you will surely conquer and deliver yourself from the shameful bonds of vice which otherwise will just as surely draw you to destruction.

Dear brethren, keep far away from you this fearful and devastating vice. It is easy to acquire, but extremely difficult to cure.

The first impure act impels to a second, the second to a third, and, unless earnestly opposed, there follows a long train of sin and dissipation because this passion becomes the more insatiable the more one seeks to satisfy it.

Chastity is a priceless treasure. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God. Amen.

XLII. On Theft

God's infinite love for mankind did not content itself with securing our body, honor and good name by divine precept. He even provided protection for our temporal possessions against the malice of others. This He did by the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal."

This commandment refers not only to common thieving and robbery, but also to acts of dishonesty from which even numerous persons of high and prominent position are not free. The Prophet Isaias says: "All have turned aside into their own way, everyone after his own gain, from the first even to the last." In innumerable ways the property of others is impaired and stolen. We will, however, restrict ourselves here to the most common kind of unlawful acquisition, namely, theft, robbery and cheating.

Theft, in the usual sense, is the secret and underhand taking of another's property against the owner's will. Guilty of stealing are, for instance, servants and employees who appropriate that which belongs to their employers, whether money or other articles.

So do children sin by theft who, during the lifetime of their parents, and without permission, appropriate to themselves objects from the household; so do those sin by stealing who, at the death of parents, or relatives, secretly take things or money to the disadvantage of others equally entitled.

Guilty of theft are, furthermore, those who declare themselves bankrupt and fraudulently appropriate valuable assets to the prejudice of the creditors.

In brief, theft is committed by everybody who, in an unlawful way, secretively appropriates that which rightfully belongs to his neighbor, or by unjust acts injures the property of others.

The second manner of acquiring unlawfully another's property is by robbery, which is theft committed with the use of violence. This is a more grievous sin than ordinary theft on account of the added injury. Highwaymen are not the only ones guilty of robbery. Everyone who deprives his neighbor by threat or compulsion is guilty of robbery; for instance, debtors who, by threat or abuse, induce their creditors to forego just claims; and persons, who by use of authority, withhold from a laborer the wages due him. In brief, all those who force others to suffer unjust loss commit robbery. This sin is, therefore, committed also by wealthy and influential persons who abuse their power and influence in order to oppress others, to overreach them, to extort from them unjust tribute.

The most common and most frequent manner of unrightfully appropriating the property of another, however, is cheating. Cheating is committed, for instance, by those who without need, go begging, who impose upon the charity and good nature of their neighbors. These cheats injure not only the almsgiver, but they do injury to the really poor and needy by creating a prejudice against them. Cheating is practised by laborers who do not faithfully perform their duty, who are idle and neglectful at their work. They are guilty of theft because they accept full wages for work which they have not performed at all, or not performed in due manner. Guilty of cheating are also tradespeople who retain a portion of the material furnished to them, or charged for by them, or who use inferior quality than that paid for. It is impossible to mention all the cunning and deceitful ways employed in every craft to overreach and cheat others.

Guilty of cheating are those who accumulate debts which they do not intend to pay, or which they know they cannot pay.

Cheating frequently takes place in buying and selling. In order

to sell honorably and honestly, four things are requisite: the article sold must belong to him who sells it; he must have the right to sell it; it must be of the quality or condition represented, and the selling price must be within the bounds of justice. As regards buying, it is unlawful to buy of minors and children without the consent of their parents, guardians, or trustees. It is unlawful also to buy of employees and servants articles concerning the ownership of which there is any reasonable doubt. Cheating is, furthermore, committed by those who use short weights and measures.

Guilty of cheating are likewise those who, in selling or buying wrongfully, profit by the ignorance and inexperience of others. Still less is it allowed to take advantage of the distress and need of others, in order to induce them to sell under value. This is not only cheating, but cruel injustice. And, needless to explain, all are cheats who assist others in cheating.

Goods obtained in an unjust way bring no advantage. "Upon the house of the unjust man and the thief," says the Lord by the mouth of the Prophet, "My curse shall descend and remain in it and destroy it." If the thief and the cheat are not already in this life punished in their unrighteous possessions, remember the words of Christ: "For what doth it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and lose his own soul?" If such people wish to make their peace with the divine Judge, they have to refund every cent which they unlawfully acquired. This is a hard, and often impossible, task for those whose heart is set upon money and wealth.

Just and honorable dealing with his fellowmen is an indispensable characteristic of the Christian. Every act to the contrary is an offense against the commandment of God to love our neighbor as ourselves, and against God who has left us the law which reads: "Thou shalt not steal." Amen.

XLIII. Mortal Sin

All creatures owe their existence to almighty God, hence they belong to Him absolutely and are obliged to offer to their Creator the homage of submission and obedience. They must be ever ready to do His holy will. Everything in creation strives to obey this fundamental law; everything is subject to God. Everything? No, I must make one exception. There is one being that would deprive his Creator of sovereignty, a son who will not acknowledge his Father, who dares to say: "I will not obey; I will not serve Thee!" Who is this presumptive being who unfurls the flag of rebellion against this powerful, eternal, omnipotent God? Alas! This being is man. Man, made of clay and dust! The frail, wretched human being, whose life is uncertain, and, at best, only of brief duration. Man rebels against his God as often as he commits mortal sin.

I will to-day, dear brethren, in order to inspire you with a great horror of sin, explain to you the great malice of the monster called mortal sin, the boundless offense which it offers to God.

Mortal sin is the greatest of all evils, because it is absolutely and directly opposed to the supreme, infinite good, to God. It is an act which so greatly offends God that neither the creatures of heaven nor of earth are capable of repairing this evil. The wisdom of God, although infinite, would, as St. Thomas says, not be capable of inventing a punishment to fit the gravity of mortal sin. A thousand hells, a thousandfold more agonizing than the hell in which the damned suffer, would not suffice to punish a single mortal sin

as it deserves to be punished. The offense offered to God by a mortal sin is infinite, because it is directed towards One who is infinite.

What is in reality this accursed mortal sin? An offense offered by a frail creature to the supreme infinite majesty of this Creator. The gravity of an offense is measured by the position of the person offended and the position of the one who offends. Hence, mortal sin is the greatest wickedness that can be imagined, an abomination, a madness, which directly assails God and injures the honor of the Almighty. To sin, therefore, is really nothing else but to rebel insolently against God, to show contempt for Him. Could there, indeed, be a blacker malice, a more fearful impiety? A sinner is in open rebellion against his God; he opposes himself to the Divine will. He says with contempt to God: "I will no longer acknowledge Thee as my Lord; I will no longer submit to Thy will, no longer obey Thy Commandments; I will live as it pleases me. I will live forgetful of God; I will profane Thy Name by curses, false oaths, and blasphemy; I will desecrate the Sabbath by servile work, by drunkenness and dissipation; I will be hard-hearted and quarrelsome towards my neighbor; I will not heed Thy Commandments." There you see what sin is: It is open rebellion of the perverted will of man against the most holy will of God, impudent opposition against God's Commandments and laws.

In order to comprehend fully the affront which man offers God by mortal sin, we must keep in mind the infinite goodness and majesty of God who is offended. God, before whom the blessed spirits veil in fear their countenances, the God of Grace and Love, the almighty God, who by a single act of His will gave existence to everything that is in heaven and upon earth, whose arrangements and laws all things obey—the sun, moon and stars, seasons and

elements—this God, so good, so great, so amiable and omnipotent, this almighty God it is who is offended, insulted, outraged.

And what renders this contumely still more hideous, what increases the offense, is the extreme insignificance of the being who commits it. Who is it that offends this almighty, awful, exalted God? A handful of dust, formed by God, animated by the divine breath; a miserable, wretched creature who cannot live a moment without the assistance of its divine Creator, a being who has received existence from God; who, by Him, has been endowed with countless gifts and blessings; whom the divine Redeemer has ransomed at the cost of His life and of His Most Precious Blood. And this contemptible creature has the audacity to insult his omnipotent God? This miserable being, who has received life from God, who is dependent upon Him every moment of his life, dares to rebel against his Creator and Preserver! This man, endowed with so many graces and blessings, dares to despise His Supreme Benefactor! This unhappy creature, redeemed from the bondage of satan at so great a price, fears not to rise in revolt against his most amiable Redeemer! Who, indeed, can adequately describe the audacity, malice, and the unspeakable wickedness of mortal sin?

And what reason has the sinner to turn his back upon God, offer such grievous indignities to Him? That he may wallow in the mire of vice; that he may gather earthly possessions without real worth! The blasphemy of it all! The sinner would annihilate God and put on the throne the filthy passion of which he makes a divinity, a shameful idol! O, impiety! O, ingratitude! O, folly! Can we imagine a greater malice than sin? It is truly an infernal monster, because it dishonors and insults God. It seems incredible that man, so privileged a creature, enriched by so many blessings, will voluntarily abandon himself to such an excess of infamy and madness.

Dear brethren, detest this terrible monster, sin. Shudder even at the very thought of letting it enter into your hearts. If you have had the misfortune to commit a grievous sin, drive it immediately from your soul. Remain faithful to God, who so dearly loves you, who has done, and is doing, so much for you, who wishes to make you eternally blessed. Do not repay your greatest Benefactor with ingratitude. But if your love of the *merciful* God is not sufficiently strong to make you abhor sin, let the fear of the *avenging* God, and of the awful punishment that will visit the hardened sinner, move your hearts to shun sin and to ensure His mercy and your salvation. Amen.

XLIV. The Consequences of Mortal Sin

Mortal sin is such a great evil on account of the monstrous offense which it offers to God, and likewise on account of the dire consequences which flow from it for man. It puts us at enmity with God, obliging Him to turn against us, as we turn against Him.

It is the opinion of the holy Fathers, that mortal sin produces in us relatively the same effects that original sin produced in the human race, namely, temporal and eternal evil.

You know that the various afflictions which beset our life, such as disease, privation, enmity, death itself, came into the world through sin. But if there are added actual, personal sins to original sin, how much heavier must not the hand of God fall upon us. True, the Lord sends afflictions to virtuous souls especially dear to Him, in order to give them greater glory. But, in general, our sufferings here below are Divine chastisements avenging already in this world the offenses offered to God. Sin, according to the words of Holy Writ, is ever a source of misery. Many fatal accidents, loss of fortunes, persecutions, vexatious and ruinous law suits, diseases, sudden deaths, have their first cause in sin.

But temporal evils such as these cannot be compared with the spiritual and eternal injury which mortal sin brings in its wake. It is called mortal sin because it brings mortality to the soul. The Soul and God, says St. Augustine, are both vivifying spirits. As the body cannot live without the soul, neither can the soul live without God. Take the soul from the body and the latter loses its life—it is nothing but a corpse. So does the soul lose spiritual life if you

take God away from it. In the same moment in which the soul gives consent to a mortal sin, it loses the life which it had in God, that most noble, precious, and most important of all possessions; it dies in God's sight. And this death is far more serious than the death of the body.

An inevitable consequence of spiritual death is the loss of all spiritual merits. As a dead man is deprived of all possessions, so likewise is the soul when it dies spiritually stripped of everything. Deprived of sanctifying grace, which adorned it and rendered it beautiful and pleasing in the sight of God, the soul becomes in the sight of God an object of aversion. The soul is deprived of all the exalted privileges and prerogatives connected with sanctifying grace, which raise the soul to a Supernatural and Divine position, to the friendship of God and to the right to the kingdom of heaven. It is deprived of all merits already acquired, in which its true fortune, its real wealth, consisted. These merits may be regained through the return to the state of grace, but until then they are completely lost. And this is not all. Mortal sin robs us not only of all former, but also of future merits, for as long as the sinner lives in the state of mortal sin, he can no longer produce any fruit for eternal life. I say for *eternal life,* mark this well. I do not say that the good works practised in the state of mortal sin are utterly useless. No, indeed; they serve to preserve us from new sins; they contribute to the preservation of good habits, and, what is far more important, they help to obtain from God the grace of conversion. Hence, it would be a false conclusion that good works in the state of sin are of no avail. But as for a reward in heaven, they have no value.

This is the condition of misery and deprivation in which a soul dead through mortal sin stands before God. It is deprived of that

life, which it had in God, and which is the foundation of all its beauty, its dignity, its merits, the root and pledge of its eternal blessedness.

It remains for me to speak about the most terrible result of mortal sin. It renders us deserving of eternal punishment. In order to realize this awful misfortune, this immeasurable, incomprehensible loss properly, it would be necessary to understand fully what heaven really is, which is lost, and also the torment into which the sinner is plunged for all eternity. But, as we cannot fully comprehend either of these states, so, too, are we incapable of fully understanding the immensity of the punishment of hell. The consideration of these things must, nevertheless, fill us with horror; it would drive us to despair if the thought of Divine mercy did not sustain us, if it did not preserve us and help us do penance.

Such are the deplorable consequences of mortal sin.

Dear brethren, flee from mortal sin as from a venomous viper. And if you have had the misfortune of falling into grievous sin, beware of remaining in it. Where is there a person who, having been bitten by a poisonous snake, would be indifferent and not immediately seek a remedy? How can you act otherwise when you find yourselves mortally wounded in your soul? If you have committed a sin, it is, no doubt, a very great misfortune, but there may be an excuse, such as a powerful temptation or the frailty of nature. But what excuse can you adduce, if, after falling into grievous sin, you continue in that condition without making an effort of forsaking it? To live heedlessly and indifferently in mortal sin leads to hardness of heart, and often to loss of faith. Beware of sin, but beware especially of impenitence. Amen.

XLV. On Relapsing into Sin

As there are various classes of sin, so there are various classes of sinners. There are some who commit sin through ignorance, others break the commandments through weakness in battling with the violent assaults of their passions, but others sin designedly and with malice. Sinners fall not infrequently in consequence of violent temptations; but there are those who have the presumption to offend God with eyes open, in cold blood; they, as the righteous Job laments, voluntarily separate themselves from the true good, which is God.

For sins committed through frailty and ignorance, the Holy Spirit promises pardon in innumerable passages of Holy Scripture (Prov. xxiv, 16; Acts iii, 17; Heb. v, 2, etc.). Sins, however, committed in malice, are more difficult to repent of. Not infrequently is this the case with relapses into sin.

For this reason, I should like to show you to-day in what a desperate condition those place themselves, who, yielding to the pernicious allurements of the devil, have the misfortune of relapsing into that deadly stupor of sin from which shortly before they had been aroused to their great delight. May you, thus warned, endeavor to persevere in the grace of God by vigilance over yourselves and shun the evil ways whence the hand of God has lovingly rescued you.

After Jesus Christ had healed the sick man who for thirty-eight years had waited at the side of the pool Bethesda to be cured, He said to him: "Sin no more, lest some worse things happen to thee." When Samson, through his infatuation for Delilah, had been taken prisoner by the Philistines, he found strength to escape his bonds,

but once he realized the malice and treachery of this woman, and still allowed himself to be beguiled by her, he challenged the Lord to forsake him. Taken prisoner again, he was now unable to break his fetters.

This is a warning for those who, rescued by God's grace from the bonds of sin, again betake themselves into danger, allow themselves again to be made captive by their passions. They have been received by the Almighty as children of God, having regained the garment of innocence and the title to eternal glory. They have experienced the blessed yoke of the Divine law and know how good the Lord is to those who love Him (Prov. viii, 17). And if, nevertheless, they return to the very vices they had thrown off (Prov. xxvi, 11), what may they expect? Of diseases of the body, we know that relapses are usually more severe than the original attack, and more likely to be fatal. And so it is with spiritual ailments. Means that succeed in arousing the sinner from the perilous sleep of sin may fail to save him in his relapse. The thought of the last judgment, of the frightful torments which await the unrepentant sinner, made a profound impression upon the youth caught in the fetters of sensuality, upon the thief, the slanderer, the drunkard. They reflected, repented of their sins, received forgiveness and regained sanctifying grace. But when they turned back to make friends again with their vices, they become hardened and stubborn, they become indifferent to their condition. Such people forfeit the grace of assistance by God by their refusal to value it when it was so freely given.

And have they not deserved, too, to be treated thus by God? Great, indeed, is their disregard of Him, the contempt, the offense which they offer Him. They had been slaves of satan, had experienced the unhappy condition of the sinner, and had then under

the banner of Christ tasted of the sweet happiness of the just. By returning to their former sins, which they had vowed to detest, have they not thereby declared that they are better pleased with the service of satan than with the service of God? If they prefer a fleeting sinful enjoyment, and renounce the eternal enjoyment of God, do they not actually declare, as St. Thomas says, that they would rather continue in this blasphemous enjoyment than receive celestial happiness? What greater insult could be offered to God?

Take heed then, my brethren, not to put yourselves again in danger of sin, otherwise you will run the risk of being forsaken by God.

The Lord has determined, as St. Alphonsus teaches, how often He will await each man's return to Him and what degree of grace He will bestow upon him. When a man relapses in excess of this number, what, then, is to become of him? Where is the sinner who knows whether the measure of his sins has not been filled and that another relapse into the same will make it probable that he will die unrepentent? The fallen angels committed one single sin, and yet they were irrevocably damned. Pharaoh had resisted the warning cry of the Lord, and he went to his destruction in the Red Sea. You, who have often offended God, what certainty, even what probability, is there you will rise up again should you fall once more? Salvation is not attained by beginning well, but by persevering to the end, as Jesus Christ teaches (Matt. x, 22).

But you will say there is great difficulty in avoiding relapses and of exercising perseverance. Temptations are frequent and violent, and our nature weak and inclined to sin. St. Bernard tells us that walking the path of perfection is in the beginning difficult and wearisome, yet practise makes it easy and enjoyable. If, therefore, you desire to persevere on the path of righteousness, you must

undertake to work your soul's salvation with zeal and steadfastness. It is not enough to say, "I will no longer offend God." You must examine with particular attention into your favorite sins, the particular faults which trouble you most, then aim directly at overcoming them. Strive to attain the virtues which are opposite to these sins. This, briefly, is the way to obtain victory over your evil inclinations and to avoid relapses into sin.

Perform your every action as if it were the last of your life. Say to yourself every day: "I may have reached the end of my life; I will to-day take particular care not to fall into sin, but to acquire much merit. If you so act you will persevere and be saved. Amen.

XLVI. On the Love of Enemies

The love of God and the love of our neighbor are the two hinges upon which all the Divine commandments turn. As all branches of a tree grow from its one trunk, so do all virtues proceed from charity, and though the Lord's commandments prescribe numerous things, they all are related to Christian charity, the origin and aim of all good works.

There are not a few Christians who believe they satisfy the commandment of loving their neighbor by being kind to their friends, by not taking revenge for insults received, and by not actually hating their enemies. This is a great mistake, because Christian charity requires not only that we love our friends in God, but we must also love our enemies for God's sake. It suffices not to take no heed of offenses endured, not to seek revenge for them, not to hate our enemies, but we must actually love them, because Jesus Christ so orders it, because the Lord does the same towards us, because we cannot be saved unless we love those who offend or persecute us.

"Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and offend you" (Matt. v, 44). These are the words of Jesus Christ. And these words are not simply words of counsel; no, they contain a strict commandment. Jesus Christ declares that if our justice does not abound more than that of the Scribes and of the Pharisees, then we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. v, 20). Revenge was forbidden to the Israelites; it was reserved to Divine justice; they were not allowed to foster hatred towards their neighbors, and had to for-

give offenders. But to Christians the commandment was given even to love their enemies, and conformance to this precept was to be a distinctive characteristic of all true Christians.

Of course, we are not obliged to give our enemies proof of special and extraordinary good will. To fulfil the Divine commandment, it suffices to manifest the acts of charity which we owe in general to our neighbor. Therefore, we must not exclude those who injure us from our prayers; we must be ever ready in all sincerity to help them in their need. Yet, if we do good to our enemies over and above this obligation, this is an agreeable sacrifice to the Lord, and a potent means of helping the one offended to eradicate all hatred and aversion from his heart, a means also, of inducing the offender to deplore his injustice. Therefore, the apostle admonishes us to overcome evil by good (Rom. xii, 21), because thereby we heap coals of fire on the head of our adversary (Rom. xii, 20; Prov. xxv, 21). This means, as St. Jerome declares, that the fire of Christian charity, by reason of which we repay offenses with benefits, effaces the malice of the offender by setting fire to it, as it were. The confusion which he usually experiences leads him to reflection, to repentance and amendment.

God did not content Himself by imposing the commandment to love our enemies; He shows us the way by His example. As often as you consent to a grievous sin, you become the enemy of God. He could at that time cast you into hell, and in justice let you feel His wrath throughout eternity. And yet He waits for your repentance. Even if you continue to be His enemy, He does not forsake you. He rather lets you experience the effects of His love and grace. He preserves your life, provides you with many natural advantages. Behold, says Jesus Christ, how the heavenly Father treats His enemies.

And, again, while sin dwelt in your hearts, while you were the enemies of God, He offered you His hand to assist you out of the abyss of your sins. He illumined your understanding that it might perceive the gravity of sins. He softened your heart and inclined it to penance. He it was, who, as if in need of your friendship, hastened to follow you, when you had gone far away from Him, who impelled you to return to the path of salvation. You were the offender, He the one offended, and yet He condescended to beg you by the lips of His priests to become reconciled to Him again. Finally, you surrendered and repented of your sins, and did the Lord content Himself by putting aside His wrath? No. He gave you back, too, the white garment of innocence, received you again into the ranks of the just, and amongst the number of His friends, and made you again an heir to His glory, so that with the Apostle St. Paul you could say: "But where sin abounded, grace hath abounded more" (Rom. v, 20).

Only one condition is necessary in order to have part in the inheritance of celestial glory, namely, that we become children of God, and therefore heirs of heaven. But in what manner can we become children of God? Jesus Christ teaches us this in plain words when He says: "Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute you and calumniate you; that you may be the children of your Father, who is in heaven" (Matt. v, 44, 45).

Heed this well, dear brethren, we cannot go to heaven unless we love our enemies in sincerity of heart. The whole law is contained in the two commandments to love God above all things, and our neighbor as ourselves. But we do not fulfil the latter commandment if we refuse good will even to a single individual. Though our enemies may have offended us, they are our neighbors; they

have their origin from the same heavenly Father, are ransomed by the same Saviour, are destined for the same goal. Hence we have no right to refuse them our affection. God permits others to offend us, in order that we may have the opportunity of exercising virtue and acquiring greater merit.

In order to comply with this Commandment, it is not sufficient merely to suppress revengeful feelings, whilst, on the other hand, we turn our backs upon our enemies and let them know that we have been offended. If you rejoice at the misfortune of your offender and are displeased at his good fortune, you may be convinced that the spirit of revenge and not of charity dwells within you. The most certain proof of your charity to enemies is a feeling of pleasure at his success, and sorrow at his misfortune, as St. Gregory states.

How can we possibly refuse to love our enemies, knowing that Jesus Christ enjoins this love upon us, that the Lord exercises the same towards us, and that without it we cannot attain to eternal glory? How can we refuse to reward offenses with benefits, injuries with good deeds, if we profess to be true disciples of Jesus Christ, who, even dying upon the Cross, implored God's forgiveness for his executioners? Let us put aside, then, for all time, all hatred, anger and enmity; let us be magnanimous towards those who trespass against us making ourselves thus worthy children of the heavenly Father. Thereby we shall induce Him, whom we have so often offended, to treat us as we treat our fellowmen. For, to use the words of St. John, it is right to return good for evil to those who partake with us of the same nature and grace, who are to participate in the same happiness, for love of the God who, when we were His enemies, reconciled us with Himself through the death of His Son (Rom. v, 10). Amen.

XLVII. Fraternal Correction

Christian charity obliges us to assist our fellowmen in bodily needs. St. John teaches that if anyone shut his heart to his neighbor's wants, the love of God is extinguished in him (John iii, 17). And St. Ambrose holds the opinion that he who, though he can prevent it, lets a fellowman perish of privation, is as guilty of death as if he had killed him by violence.

If, then, a strict commandment obliges us to assist our fellowmen in the needs of the mortal body, must not Christian charity, even to a greater degree, oblige us to give assistance to the immortal soul, created to the image of God, redeemed by the Blood of the Son of God, and destined to live eternally in the happiness of heaven? How can it be possible that we should be required to rescue the body and be free to allow the soul to go to destruction? Plainly, this cannot be. A special means of giving assistance to the spiritual welfare of our fellowmen is fraternal correction, and this means has been particularly impressed upon us by Jesus Christ. Care for the spiritual welfare is of as much more importance than rendering bodily assistance, as the soul is so infinitely more noble than the body. Yet, how difficult it seems to exercise fraternal correction.

Sharp criticism, even appalling calumnies, are quite common. But when there is need of extending a helping hand for the welfare of a neighbor's soul, men become silent. Many seem to think that to correct those who are at fault is a perfection, not a duty. We shall see, however, that fraternal correction is not merely a counsel,

but an important obligation, not only for superiors, but for all of us without exception.

God anticipates the conversion of a sinner by an interior impelling of His grace, but the sinner must cooperate with the grace of God. If, then, the sinner is indifferent to the interior inspirations of Divine grace, an external stimulus is often of great advantage in arousing him from his sleep of sin. God alone is, of course, thoroughly capable of converting the sinner by inspiring him with an effective detestation of his sin, but He demands that the members of the mystical Body of Christ render one another assistance in their spiritual need as well as in the needs of the body.

Holy Scripture provides a very instructive example of this truth. When King David became an adulterer and murderer, he knew well that he committed crimes against the laws of God. We must suppose that the Lord stirred his heart with unrest and remorse of conscience, in order to bring him to repentance. But a whole year had elapsed and David was still impenitent. What did God do to induce him to repentance? He sent the prophet Nathan to David, and he presented to the king, in the guise of a parable, the crimes he had committed. The words of the prophet and his implied reprimand made more impression upon David than all the gnawings of conscience during many months. He confessed his guilt and effaced it by such great contrition that Nathan, before he left him, declared him to be reinstated in the friendship of God (II. Kings xii, 5, 7, 14).

You may reply it is perfectly becoming for prophets and priests to exhort the erring, but that a lay person cannot presume to go to a neighbor and upbraid him for his shortcomings. But I say to you, the commandment of fraternal correction, as the fruit of Christian charity, obliges all Christians without exception, as the Holy Ghost

teaches us (Ecclus. xvii, 12). Of course, it must be exercised with great caution and prudence. The apostle exhorts the younger people in their exhortations of older persons not to rush in upon them, but to assume the part of a respectful petitioner, rather than that of a censor (Tim. v, 1). If, with kindly words, with expressions of ardent good will from a heart, only solicitous for God's honor and our neighbor's salvation, you admonish your neighbor at the right time and place privately, your admonition rarely provokes to anger. "On the contrary," says St. Cyprian, "he will feel bound afterwards to thank you for placing him in a position of forsaking his errors."

Indeed, as correction is intended to promote the neighbor's amendment, so in case where it would, without doubt, be useless intrusion, prudence requires silence, and exhortations would probably make matters worse. Still, do not be too hasty in concluding that admonitions will be useless, as this impression may be due to your desire to have nothing to do with the case, rather than to prudence. Who, indeed, can tell with certainty, whether a sinner apparently ever so hardened, may not be ready to follow the voice of him, who, supported by Divine grace, exhorts him, rather than be offended and angry? Admonish with charity and gentleness, and fear not.

It may happen, nevertheless, that you encounter persons who you may prudently suppose are not going to listen to exhortations, and under such conditions keep silence; but even in such cases you may exercise fraternal correction by manifesting in your demeanor, without intending offense, your disapproval of the sinful conduct. Refuse to listen to indecent talk—to calumny. Silence in conversation, or avoidance of association, will occasionally be an impressive admonition for the erring.

If we foster a true Christian charity, we shall not be likely to transgress the commandment of brotherly correction. Let us truly love God and the soul of our fellowman, so dear to Him; love it so well as to seek to save it, and it will at least be difficult for our neighbor not to listen to our gentle exhortations and to draw profit therefrom. If there were more concern for the spiritual welfare of fellowmen, the world would be better than it is.

Let us not overlook the great advantage we derive from this form of neighborly love. We gain, first of all, our brethren, as the apostle writes (James v, 1).

How consoling it is to gain a soul, to draw it from the abyss, to restore it to God. What a priceless gain. Is it not a truly apostolic office, one exceedingly pleasing to God? The same apostle writes that whosoever restrains a sinner from the path of destruction, covers a multitude of his own sins, as God will be moved thereby to grant him special graces to attain to the knowledge of his own faults. And if our correction of our neighbor should remain without result, yet our work of spiritual mercy will not remain unrewarded by God, who measures our merits according to our endeavors and not according to their success, which does not depend upon us.

In consideration of these facts, let us be zealous in fulfilling this duty. And if, in doing so, we suffer unpleasantness or enmity, let us remember the words of Jesus Christ, who promised: "Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v, 10). Amen.

XLVIII. Human Respect

I wish to talk to you to-day about a particular enemy of our salvation, an enemy who assails many weak Christians and brings ruin to a great number. It is human respect. Numerous are its victims. Many become its prey. Called by Christ to be warriors beneath the flag of the Cross, to taste the sweetness of His yoke, to partake of His glorious banquet in the holy Sacraments, to persevere in prayer, to listen to the divine Word, human respect causes many to neglect the means of grace which their Saviour offers them, to turn their backs upon Him; they are Christians in name only and not in their deeds.

In order to fortify you against this enemy, to encourage you to oppose and conquer the same, I will show you how injurious human respect is, how unreasonable, how disgraceful it is for Christians to let themselves be influenced by it.

The Christian true to his faith has at all times been persecuted. In the early ages he was harried by bloodthirsty Roman emperors; later on, and to our very days, by unbelievers, and, alas, by their own brethren in Christ. Many are the Christians in name who, not content with ignoring the commandments, ridicule and mock those who are faithful to their religious duties. Their aim is to induce others to live as they do, so that their sinful conduct may be condoned by the concord of others. It is impossible to imagine the injury which these helpers of satan cause to weak Christians, who let themselves be influenced by them, instead of treating them with well-deserved contempt.

Here is a youth leading a dissolute life. Finally, urged by his

conscience, he determines to reform. He begins to attend church prays most fervently, and receives the Sacraments. But behold, when his companions in vice perceive that he has become decent, respectable and religious, they laugh at him, ridicule him, call him a hypocrite, a weakling. And this youth, weak and unable to bear ridicule, gives way to his human respect, becomes ashamed to go to church, to the Sacraments, more or less gradually goes back to his vicious ways. This is a fair example of the pernicious influence of human respect. With little changes the same thing happens in all walks of life. No man nor woman is secure from this sort of persecution, a persecution vastly more devastating than the bloody massacres of Christians in the early ages.

And not only are there Christians who, for fear of being ridiculed, omit the good they are bound to do, there are those even who do evil in order to escape the suspicion of being faithful to their Church, of being virtuous and God-fearing.

Some one has been insulted, but he intends to forgive like a Christian. But there are his friends to reckon with. They say he must not tolerate any such treatment. He must get square, must return insult for insult, blow for blow, and the poor foolish man shelves his own better sentiments and does something which he dislikes, which brings him certain injury, something forbidden by God, just to escape the criticism of his so-called friends. It seems so foolish, so contrary to the common good, and yet we see it happen every day.

Another person is made an ear-witness of base calumnies, of blasphemies; fun is made of sacred things, immodest conversations are carried on in his presence. He or she knows the falsehood of the calumny, knows it is sinful to participate in such conversation; at heart they even dislike it, but they fear to contradict,

they fear to appear more decent, more respectable than their despicable companions, smile at the foul language, and pretend by their behavior to enjoy it. They give it their sanction and join in the sin. Tell me, am I not right? Have you not seen it happen? Why should anyone be ashamed to appear devout and God-fearing? Why should you blush while honoring and serving the Supreme Lord? Why forsake the path to heaven, and take to the road to hell, in order to escape gossip, to escape ridicule? What folly! What shame!

And what is it, really, what does it amount to, this gossip, this ridicule, of others? Are you really so inexperienced as not to know that you cannot please men, no matter what you do? If you live as true Christians, people may say you are simple, silly, old-fashioned, hypocrites. If you essay an indifferent or vicious life, they will say you are unprincipled, unreliable, immoral, without respect for God or law. But if the world despises one thing more than another it is the weakling, the man without honor and backbone, the man, or woman, for that matter, who is afraid to show his or her true colors, who have not sincerity and self-respect enough to stand for what they know is right. Reputable, decent people will not criticize you for living up to your religion, to your principles. Who derides you, who calls you a devotee, a bigot? The Holy Ghost gives us the answer. He says: "He that walketh in the right way and feareth God, is despised by him that goeth by an infamous way" (Prov. xiv, 2). And on account of such people, because of their derision and mockery, would you be ashamed to profess to be true Christians, to be persons of honor, of religion, of the fear of God? In order to escape their disdain, their displeasure, would you sacrifice your soul's salvation and cast yourselves into hell? (Matt. x, 32). What can be more foolish, more shameful?

Fear God, not the talk of the world. Think of saving your soul. Do not concern yourself with the ridicule of the ungodly. Live and act as true Christians. Despise the world and its judgment. Remember that at the hour of your death all the praise and commendation of your neighbors will be absolutely of no avail, if it is contrary to the judgment of your Maker, whose displeasure is the only displeasure to be feared. Amen.

XLIX. Spiritual Sloth

The behavior of many Christians must fill us with amazement, since, despite their profession of firm belief in the Gospel, their hope of eternal life, they live in neglect of their soul's welfare, and seem to think of nothing else but the affairs of this world. They are busy day and night acquiring worldly goods, seeking honor and enjoyment, but they concern themselves little, or not at all, about heaven. Occasionally they perform religious exercises, but only in deference to custom, not with any intention of really serving God and of gaining His good will. These people are possessed by the vice of spiritual sloth. I will try and show you the disastrous consequences this vice brings in its train, so that you may avoid it, or free yourselves from it.

Spiritual sloth is a sinful aversion against all activity required for the acquisition or exercise of virtue. It is sinful of itself, and also on account of the disastrous effects which it produces. Hence, the Holy Ghost teaches us that idleness is the mother of unhappiness and misery (Prov. vi, 11; x, 4). For our salvation it is not sufficient to abstain from evil, we must also endeavor to do good. The vice of sloth, producing aversion and disgust for divine things, is in direct opposition to the virtue of charity, and hence is one of the seven capital sins. He who truly loves God serves Him with zeal and joy, he would even suffer death if this were required to prevent the loss of grace. The slothful, on the contrary, do no good works, avoid the exertion, pay no attention to the exactions of the commandments.

There is the woman who fails to hear holy Mass on Sundays in order to attend to her household affairs. That man's children are not sent to Sunday-school, because he wants them to study their school lessons just at that time; it suits him better. Another one refuses to submit to the trifling exactions of the Lenten regulation. And so on. Indifferently they live on until finally the hour of death approaches and finds them without merits for heaven, but burdened with sins of omission, with a record for neglect of their most important duties.

Do you doubt that the aversions and the excuses of these people are due to sloth? Observe them at festivities, at their leisure time. Then convenience does not count. Neither heat nor cold will keep them away from a favorite pastime. Health, money, time, everything is gladly sacrificed for enjoyment after their heart's desire. These are the same people for whom a clouded sky is sufficient excuse to stay away from Mass. The words of Scripture are but too true. Great is the iniquity of them who persuade themselves that the observance of the Commandments of God is hard and wearisome, the first of which enjoins thee to love God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind (Matt. xxii, 37; Deut. vi, 5).

The result is that such people are exposed to sin, dominated by regard for comfort and pleasure they are in danger of being lost forever, yet they live on unconcernedly as regards eternity. Slaves of their sloth, their heart is filled with evil desires and grievous sins, which the Holy Spirit calls nettles and thorns and which grow exuberantly in the fields of the slothful man (Prov. xxiv, 31). Then distaste for good works and disregard for virtue make them as unwilling to listen to the teachings of the Gospel, as was the governor of Judea, who, when he heard St. Paul speaking about

chastity, justice and the judgment to come, answered: "For this time go thy way; but at a convenient time I will send for thee."

It is peculiar to sloth, furthermore, to generate hatred and aversion toward those who, by their blameless lives and zeal in God's service, are a censure to the slothful. Hence they not only omit the practise of good works, but even revile and persecute the just. The slothful find fault with the divine law and with the commandments of the Church. They dispute the necessity of going to Confession, instructions in Christian doctrine are to them superfluous. They are displeased with those who are faithful to their religious duties. Their conversation, as the Book of Wisdom records it, is: "Let us, therefore, lie in wait for the just, because he is not for our turn: and he is contrary to our doings, and upbraideth with transgressions of the law, and divulgeth against us the sins of our way of life. He is become a censurer of our thoughts" (Wis. xi, 12, 14).

The Lord's command to the Israelites never to let the fire upon the altar become extinguished (Lev. vi, 12), is to give us to understand, says St. Gregory, that it is impossible to please God if our heart is not unceasingly consumed with the love of God. Neglect and idleness displease the Lord, and he who lives in the neglect of his soul's salvation is in great danger of dying in that state. For the Holy Spirit tells us that if fear of effort and fatigue restrain us from labor, we shall find ourselves miserable and unhappy and without hope of any help whatever when the time of the harvest shall come and the hour of our death approaches (Prov. xx, 4). Who knows the moment in which he will be called out of the world? We see daily how men and children, youth and old age, suddenly step over into eternity, and the same thing may happen to one of us here. Would it not be a great misfortune if the Lord found no good works in us to be rewarded, and would be obliged to punish our idleness

and negligence, as happened to the slothful servant in the Gospel, who, because he had buried the talent that was confided to him, and had not done good with it, was damned everlastingly (Matt. xxv, 26).

Let us beware, therefore, of the vice of sloth and follow the advise of the great apostle: "Serving the Lord in solicitude and ferver of spirit" (Rom. xii, 11). It is not difficult, it is not wearisome, to live well. A virtuous life is full of spiritual consolations, full of joy and delight. The yoke of the divine law is sweet, and the burden of the divine commandments is light (Matt. xi, 30). It only appears unbearable to those who refuse to take it upon themselves. The Lord will reward in heaven the pains taken in His service, and the slightest inconvenience endured for love of Him will be rewarded with the delights of eternal glory. Amen.

L. Anger

The three chief passions which govern the world are, according to St. John, pride, avarice, and impurity. Nevertheless there are other passions which we must shun and fear, because they are most injurious to the soul and become the source of many other sins.

One of these passions is anger, that violent emotion which causes confusion to ourselves and others, and which in a certain sense is more dangerous than other passions, because little is made of it, just as with those maladies which have no dangerous aspect, although they may easily have fatal consequences. The sin of anger is usually regarded as a fault of character and temperament, rather than a voluntary sin. Hence anger is often indulged in without restraint, without any concern, without effort of suppression.

In order to understand how hateful this vice is, how pernicious its consequences, let us give our consideration to this passion.

It is to be observed, first of all, that anger is not always sin. If it arises from zeal for justice, if it proceeds from righteous causes, it is no sin. When a priest of God severely reproves the heedless, when parents are startled at the faults of their children, and chastise them in reason, when a man's malice excites displeasure, such anger is no sin, but rather fervor for the cause of God. Man may become angry at wickedness and proceed to suppress it for the sake of order and justice. Care must be taken lest such zeal pass the bounds of justice and reason. Even righteous displeasure must be controlled, faults must be punished at the appropriate time and not harshly, but according to the rules of prudence and charity. For we must strive not

only for the uprooting of evil, but also for the welfare of the sinner.

The passion of anger is sinful, and prohibited by God, when our intent is not to avenge God's honor, to reprove the erring and uproot evil, but when we let ourselves be drawn to anger and wrath by wrongful impatience. Sinful anger is the unlawful exciting of temper whereby we reject with vehemence that which is not in accord with our views or feelings. It is often the effect of another passion which is striving to satisfy itself and encounters obstacles.

Pride, for instance, begets anger against those who hurt our vanity and ambition; the avaricious man falls into a rage when he encounters obstacles to the carrying out of his plans.

When the vice of anger once takes root in the heart it may render men frantic. In their passion their eyes flame, their language and gestures are wild and threatening. Their whole body is as in a spasm. Such a person is no longer like a human being, but rather like a raging beast that threatens to slay if not kept in restraint. Such a person cries for vengeance, and calls to his aid the devil himself, his lips vilify shamefully the sacred and adorable name of God. What impiety! The angry man, as it were, dethrones God and sacrifices Him to the evil spirits by which he is possessed.

The spectacle is one which fills with disgust any man with a sense of dignity and fear of God. Anger not only makes man act like a wild beast, but it destroys the peace of families, sows discord, enmity and hatred in families, amongst neighbors and friends. Not infrequently we see how it leads to injustice, to quarrel, even to murder. When in anger man is not amenable to reason; he has not even a clear idea of what he is doing. In anger man is capable of destroying precious objects, of insulting that which he ordinarily worships, of taking the life of those even who otherwise are dear to him. Yes, to this extent does this dangerous passion take possession

of man! The angry man, says the Holy Spirit, renders himself guilty of many bad deeds towards his neighbor and of his own murder (Ecclus. 26). Violent anger, moreover, destroys the health, shortens life, and causes sudden death. This raging passion wears out the body, it cuts the thread of life prematurely.

Let us, therefore, beware of the horrible monster of anger, which, by obscuring the light of reason, makes man like unto the unreasoning animal, changes man into a devil. A powerful bridle to keep this passion in check is the reflection that without patience in bearing contradictions it is not possible to attain eternal salvation, that all suffering and misfortunes come to us from God, who permits them to visit us in order to put our love to the test, and to give us an opportunity, by bearing them patiently and with cheerful resignation to His holy will, to merit eternal glory. For this reason the pious Job praised the Lord in the extremity of his misery and asked that it be done to him as it pleased the Lord (Job i, 21). Let us accept patiently whatever is sent to us by God, who disposes all things for our good.

If, notwithstanding your restraint, you feel yourself incited to anger, hasten to smother the first sparks of it, so that it may not enkindle a great conflagration in your heart. Reflect that anger renders men unreasoning, that Jesus Christ has strictly prohibited it, and has given you an example of meekness, by enduring without complaint, for love of you, insults, calumnies, tortures and death. By such consideration you will pacify yourself and repel an outburst of this evil passion. The Incarnate Son of God promises us that the meek are blessed (Matt. v, 4), and the Holy Spirit teaches us (Psalm xxvi, 2) that he who avoids anger is happy even in this life, and will enjoy an undisturbed peace, which is a sure pledge of that peace that we shall enjoy everlastingly in heaven. Amen.

LI. Giving Scandal

St. Jerome was of the opinion that life in community, in the world, is to be preferred to the life of the hermit, because it is easier to acquire virtues when we see them practised by others, than if we practise them alone. Had he known the moral corruption into which men would gradually fall, I think he might have changed his opinion, He would rather have advised people to retreat into the the wilderness, to live among wild beasts rather than to have daily before their eyes the wickedness of the world. It is indeed marvelous that innocence may remain undefiled in spite of the shameful example set by the world. Wo unto the scandal giver, his offence cries to heaven for vengeance.

Scandal is a sin easily committed, and great precaution is necessary in order to avoid it; it is, furthermore, a grave sin, and, finally, it is difficult to make reparation for the injury done by this sin.

By scandal giving is understood any action or word, which is an occasion of sin to another. You see, therefore, how easily such sins may be committed. It should not be imagined that public sinners, notoriously bad persons, are the only scandal givers. They are not even the most dangerous ones, because their actions are known to be wicked. The most pernicious scandal is given by those who wear sheep's clothing to disguise their corrupt nature and intentions, who, under the guise of decency and respectability, seduce others to sin.

Scandal is given by suggestive talk, by jesting, by unseemly

witticisms in which virtue and religion are made the subject of irreverent scorn. There is scandal given even in the church, in God's own temple, by vain or unbecoming dress of women, by unseemly demeanor, by exhibition of indifference, or even irreverence. There is the man who gives scandal by his cursing and swearing in foul and blasphemous language. But more pernicious than this is the scandal given in the Catholic home by parents who allow their children to learn from them indifference in religion, neglect of the means of grace, or even worse things than these. Scandal is given by those who allow in their homes immodest pictures, bad and anti-Catholic books and newspapers. These are only a few examples, and you can no doubt largely increase the list from your own experience. The giving of scandal is a very grievous sin indeed.

In the first Epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul impresses upon the faithful the malice of the scandal of which some had made themselves guilty by participating in pagan banquets. He told them that they had mortally wounded the weak conscience of brethren for whose redemption Jesus Christ died. That such scandal is a gross offense against the sacred laws. Take notice, says St. John Chrysostom, how the Apostle emphasizes the magnitude of this transgression. What could be more brutal than to strike a sick man, what more heartless than to slay a brother, what more sacrilegious than to tear those away from Christ whom He has rescued by His bitter passion and death?

Alas, how often are parents doing this very thing to their own children. Many are they who sin thus against those united to them by sacred ties.

How, indeed, can the givers of scandal view with indifference the fall of souls through their bad example. All these souls that

have cost Jesus Christ so much suffering, do they deserve no consideration on your part? The Incarnate God did not hesitate to let Himself be crucified, and do you suppose He will leave you unpunished for annihilating in such manner the fruits of His death?

To those who with design seek to lead others to wrongdoing apply the words of Jesus Christ: "Wo to the giver of scandal. It were better for him that he had never been born, if he had died before his birth." He declares such a person to be not only an enemy to the Cross, but to the life, the Blood and the redemption of the Saviour.

Scandal giving causes an injury which it is extremely difficult to repair. Scandal giving injures not only the person scandalized, but also Jesus Christ, his Redeemer. Scandal deprives the former of the grace of heaven, which is his spiritual life; it deprives Jesus Christ of the soul which He had reclaimed from sin. For the expiation of this grievous injury, there are required contrition and reparation of the harm done so far as it is possible. Such reparation is very difficult, dear brethren. As easy as it may be to lead the innocent into sin, it is extremely difficult, and often impossible, to make them take again the road of virtue. And to think that some souls are perhaps suffering in hell on account of the scandal this or that one has given. If even the blood of martyrs, although they are forever blessed, cries to God for vengeance upon the cruel hands that shed it (Apoc. vi, 10), what retribution will the cry of such damned souls demand?

Christ will say to the scandal giver, "Give back to Me the souls you have taken from Me. Give back to Me this price of My blood." Should not this thought make us tremble and fear even if we are not conscious of intended scandal giving?

But to him who is guilty of seduction, of the ruin of souls, there

remains one means of improving his unhappy lot, and this is ardent zeal in leading other souls to God, by good example, by persuasion and by the exercise of Christian charity in all things. The same weapons which served unrighteousness, says the Apostle, may now serve righteousness. This is the duty of everyone who has given scandal.

Dear brethren, beware of giving scandal, of tearing souls away from the Heart of Jesus, and drawing them towards the road of perdition. It is so easy to commit this sin and so difficult to undo the harm. Keep in mind at all times the words with which Jesus Christ warned the scandal giver: "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. xviii, 6, 7).

LII. Frequent Confession

So marvelous are the effects of the holy Sacrament of Penance that they should fill us with a holy ardor to receive these benefits frequently. This Sacrament liberates us from the slavery of the devil, gives us the freedom of God's children, saves us from perdition, and gives us the title to eternal happiness. What can be the reason then of the indifference of so many people for this great source of grace, of their distaste, even aversion for it? Frequent visits to the church, to holy Mass and other divine services are practised by many Christians who seldom think of going to Confession, even when they realize their need of receiving the Sacrament of Penance. It is unfortunately true that many Christians go seldom to Confession because they do not wish to give up certain sinful habits, while others fail to go on account of indifference and lack of piety.

So as to induce you to frequent Confession, I will point out its importance, and will put before you the contrast which is presented, on the one side by the dangers of an infrequent Confession, and on the other, by the salutary effects of frequent Confession. It is obvious that the longer Confession is postponed the more difficult it becomes.

The difficulty is great as regards the examination of conscience. The examination of conscience must be a searching one, it must extend to sins of commission and omission, to sins by words, thoughts and deed. The longer one has staid away from Confession the harder the task to properly examine the conscience. The diffi-

culty is great also as regards contrition. The longer a sinful habit has been indulged in, the more difficult it becomes to realize its wickedness. The longer you remain in a sin, the less culpable it seems, the more difficulty you will find in detesting it. . . . It will become hard to repent of it. A Confession without sincere contrition is, however, sacrilegious.

A still greater difficulty will be found with regard to the resolution to amend. Attachment to sin grows the longer one remains addicted to it, bad habits become stronger, and yet a firm intention to avoid that favorite sin, that bad habit, that near occasion, is required to make the absolution valid. These things prove plainly that a Confession long postponed, is not only made difficult, but is even in danger of being made without the required disposition, and, therefore, in danger of being made unworthily. It is not my intention to discourage those who for some length of time have neglected Confession. No, my intention is to make them think earnestly on this subject, and not to delay longer to partake of this holy Sacrament. The longer they wait the greater the difficulties. If they realize their error, and turn to God with a truly contrite heart, the All-merciful will support them with His potent grace and enable them to make a good Confession.

The beneficial effect of frequent Confession must be apparent to all. By a frequent examination of conscience a better knowledge is gained of the state of the soul, of imperfections and shortcomings.

Contrition often awakened is more lively, good resolutions are more likely to last when often recalled and renewed. Frequent Confession is a powerful check to sin, for it will not allow sin to become rooted in your soul. You will continually enjoy the friendship and peace of God, and enrich yourself with merit.

Finally, there is a powerful incentive to virtue in the frequent instructions and counsels given by the confessor.

You see, therefore, how important it is to go often to Confession, and how greatly those deceive themselves who look upon frequent Confession as unnecessary. If you wish to secure your eternal welfare then hasten frequently to that saving remedy for sin. Do not unduly postponed Confession, least of all if you have fallen into grievous sin. The danger to which you expose yourself by remaining in sin is great, death may suddenly overtake you, and you may be lost forever. Remember the warning of the Holy Ghost who exhorts us not to hesitate to be converted to the Lord (Eccl. i, 5, 8). Hasten, therefore, if burdened with grievous sin, to arise from it.

A good Confession will place you again in the state of sanctifying grace, but it will not confirm you in the same and render you safe from sin. Therefore, go frequently to holy Confession in order to obtain the necessary strength to persevere unto the end. Amen.

LIII. How to Hear Holy Mass Well

There is no holier nor more exalted sacrifice than the adorable sacrifice of the Mass, in which Jesus Christ, under the appearance of bread and wine, offers Himself up through the hands of the priest, in order to perpetuate His Sacrifice upon the Cross, and to apply to us its merits. There is no means whereby we can worship and adore the Lord in a more worthy manner. Upon the altar at holy Mass, Jesus Christ humbles and abases Himself before His heavenly Father, although He is equal to Him in all things. God could receive no greater glorification than He receives in the exalted sacrifice of the altar, because in it is renewed the infinite homage which Jesus Christ offered to the heavenly Father by His sacrifice on the Cross, And as in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass God finds His glorification, so man finds therein his sanctification, and from all this we may perceive that we ought to assist at Mass with proper disposition in order to participate in the magnificent fruits which it conveys to the truly devout.

The Christian takes part in holy Mass, both as devout assistant and as offerer of the same. Upon our right intention in either capacity depends the fruit which we draw from this sacred action. To assist at holy Mass requires profound reverence and respectful deportment. Had we been present upon Calvary when the Lord shed His precious Blood upon the Cross, with what reverence and devotion would we have witnessed this tremendous sacrifice. Our reverence must be no less when we appear before the altar upon which the same sacrifice is offered up. "Tremble in the presence

of my sanctuary," said the Lord to the sons of Israel (Lev. xxvi, 2). How much more should we be filled with holy awe when we approach the altar upon which this same God sacrifices himself! Whilst the seraphim and saints pray for us, while Jesus Christ Himself presents our case to the Father, and implores mercy from Divine justice, how could we dare silence these supplications by irreverent behavior, and dispose God to anger rather than to mercy?

The second capacity in which the Christian takes part in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass is that of offerer. The Son of God is filled with so ardent charity for men, that He has not only imparted to them His graces and gifts, but also a share in His official functions, because He desires that we should co-operate in His glorification of God. One of His principal functions as Redeemer is that of an eternal high priest (Ps. cix, 5). He desired that all the faithful should participate in this priesthood and in a certain sense He consecrated them as priests with His Blood in Baptism (I. Pet. xi, 9). For this reason it is not the priest at the altar alone who offers the most holy sacrifice, but all the faithful present also offer it up.

You, dear brethren, who are in this sense priests when assisting at holy Mass, you must consequently offer up the Divine Sacrifice for a fourfold end, corresponding to your most sacred obligations, namely, in order to adore and propitiate God, and to offer Him your thanksgiving and your petitions. Each one of you is like to that servant who owed his Lord a large sum, and Divine justice appears with the demand, "Pay what thou owest" (Matt. xviii, 28). Kneel down at Mass, therefore, and with sentiments of humblest reverence, but also of confidence, urge the Lord: "Have pity on me, I will pay thee all." With the holy Sacrifice of the Mass I will pay my debt to Thee. I owe Thy Infinite Majesty an infinite reverence and as I have not the means of myself to satisfy the same, I

take refuge in the wounds of my Redeemer. So will I also humble myself like Jesus Christ upon the altar, with Him I will reverence Thee profoundly. For my sins I owe infinite satisfaction, but I will offer a sacrifice that will cause Thee far more glory than that of which I have deprived Thee by my sins. I owe Thee infinite thanksgiving, and with this great sacrifice I shall pay the same in full. I have infinite need of Thy assistance, but as I am not worthy to appear alone before Thee, I will come before Thee with Jesus Christ, who sacrifices Himself for me, and in this way Thou wilt not refuse me. As Thou canst not reject this sacrifice, Thou wilt not despise me, because I unite myself with it and through it implore for grace and mercy.

These should be your sentiments when assisting at holy Mass, and in cooperating with the priest in this great Mystery.

Have you ever duly reflected upon the sanctity of this most sublime mystery of holy Mass? Have you realized the great work you were performing as you assisted at the same? The infinite wealth of grace contained in this treasure which the infinite mercy of God communicates to you? Have the dispositions with which you assisted at holy Mass corresponded with the sanctity of this most sublime sacrifice? May a lively faith, above all, always accompany you to this sacred act, the greatest and most sublime mystery of our holy religion. Imagine that you are ascending Mount Calvary to be a witness of the crucifixion and of the death of Christ. In invoking divine assistance let your mind and hearts be filled with sentiments of devotion and piety.

Beware of assisting at holy Mass in distraction of spirit, with coldness of heart, or with a disrespectful and negligent demeanor. For, thereby, you would deprive yourself of the fruits of the sacrifice.

Before concluding my instruction I feel obliged to commend to

you the frequent assistance at holy Mass. I mean on those days which do not come under the commandment of the Church, because on Sunday and holy days of obligation you are strictly obliged to attend Mass. There are, unfortunately, some Christians who can hardly make up their minds to hear Mass even on Sundays and holy days. And it is a most deplorable state of things that so many Christians who could assist at holy Mass also on week days neglect to do this. What ingratitude for Christ's love for us and the great sacrifice which He presents upon the altar. What indifference to this great, indeed greatest of God's blessings. What neglect of our own welfare.

If time permit never neglect to hear holy Mass even upon days when it is not of ecclesiastical precept. You will thus give supreme honor to God and care for your own welfare. It will be for you of paramount advantage during your life and particularly at death. For at that last hour God will surely with His special assistance and visible protection, stand by those who in their lives had a great devotion to the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Amen.

LIV. Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Acting upon the inspiration which the Holy Ghost is daily imparting to her, the Church has instituted feasts in commemoration of the chief mysteries in the Blessed Virgin's life. She celebrates in an especial manner the Immaculate Conception, the holy birth, the divine Motherhood, the sufferings, and the glorious death and assumption into heaven, of the sweet Mother of Christ.

To-day the Church is celebrating the feast of her Immaculate Conception, and I wish to point out to you wherein the exalted privilege consists by which Mary was thus distinguished, and how she corresponded with this extraordinary grace with which God adorned her. Alone among all mankind, Mary, by a special grace, was conceived without the stain of original sin, because it was befitting the dignity of Jesus Christ that His human mother should never be sullied by sin; never, not even for a moment, subjected to the dominion of Satan. This the Church has solemnly declared and prescribed for our belief.

It is truly a glorious privilege which was bestowed upon the Blessed Virgin at her conception. In order to form a proper idea of it, let us contemplate the unhappy state in which we all were born. Upon us rests the penalty of the fatal fall of our first parents. At our conception we were burdened with the stain of original sin and with its awful penalty. We all were born sinners, children of wrath, slaves of the devil.

Mary, alone of all mankind, has been exempt from this misfortune from the moment of her conception. Among mankind the Lord has at

various times selected specially favored friends, but notwithstanding His love for them, notwithstanding His manifestations of grace bestowed upon these privileged souls, not one of them was ever freed from this baneful inheritance. It was their fate, as it was the fate of all children of Adam, to suffer the penalty.

How different was Mary's happy lot. Although a child of Adam, like the rest of us, although the offspring of a father fallen into sin, she did not inherit the penalty ordained for the rest of mankind. What an honor, indeed, is this prerogative of grace. Had God been pleased to sanctify her just before her birth, she would have shared this great grace with John the Baptist. Had God satisfied Himself with pouring out upon her His graces, she would have shared such honor with the apostles and other saints. But God wished to make a marked difference even between the elect souls and His Mother, even between the saints and their queen, by exempting her from original sin, a privilege which no one ever shared with her.

And what were the results of this distinct sanctification of Mary? The first result was this, that she never experienced an inclination to evil, she never experienced this direful consequence of original sin. From the first moment she was, in body and soul, completely subject to the spirit of God. From that very moment she could exclaim, "all generations shall call me blessed, for He that is mighty hath done great things in me."

The second blessed result of the special sanctification of the Immaculate Virgin was, that she ever remained zealous in preserving and increasing the grace which she had received. Although exempt from human infirmities and confirmed in God's grace from her conception, still she incessantly strove to be most faithful in the fulfilment of all her duties, and spent much time in prayer.

Although absolutely free from sin, she accepted adversity and suffering with humility and patience. She had her full share in the sufferings of her divine Son and in the great sorrows of Golgotha. In such manner she daily even increased the grace with which she had been endowed from the very moment of her conception.

Let us rejoice, dear brethren, in this glorious Immaculate Conception. Let us thank the Lord that He has distinguished the blessed Virgin by so great and extraordinary a privilege; and let us in confidence seek our refuge in the purest of Virgins, so that she may obtain for us, through her powerful intercession, purity of body and soul, and victory over all temptations. Let us address to her in the hours of temptation that brief prayer: "Through thy most holy Immaculate Conception, O Mary, preserve my body and soul from all impurity." Let us often during the day salute the blessed Virgin with the short ejaculation: "Hail Mary, conceived without sin," and me may be sure that she, who is not only the Virgin of Immaculate Conception, but also the Mother of God, will graciously hear our prayers and that she will intercede for us with her divine Son, and a more powerful mediator we could not desire. Amen.

LV. The Nativity of Our Lord

Dear brethren, the great festival for which the Church prepares us in the four weeks of Advent has arrived. We celebrate to-day the mystery of our blessed Lord's nativity. The promise which He gave to the Patriarchs, which He proclaimed through the Prophets, this promise is finally fulfilled: the ardent desire of the just is realized; the prophecies of the coming of the Messias are confirmed. The Saviour is born to us, and the Church invites us to celebrate this exalted event.

While inviting you to give up your hearts to sacred joy, I wish you also to consider the particular circumstances under which the birth of the divine Redeemer took place. Profitable lessons may be drawn from them for the guidance of our own lives, and fruits for life everlasting may be gained through an earnest contemplation of the sublime mystery which we commemorate to-day.

The human eye perceives in the divine Infant a frail, helpless creature, trembling with cold, lacking even the bare necessities, lying among cattle in a hard crib, an outcast from humanity as it were. And to think that this lowly infant is the eternal Son of God, the Infinite, Almighty God, the joy of the Blessed, the peace and happiness of those who truly believe in Him! In His human appearance there is nothing to distinguish Him from other infants, unless it be the fact that He came into this world in a condition of greater poverty and abasement than others. But our spiritual eye realizes that He is the promised Messias, the desired of the nations, the Redeemer, the true God. In fulfilment of the prophecies He is born of a Virgin; He is born at the place as foretold; He is born

at the time appointed by the prophet Daniel, and angels announce His birth to the shepherds.

Jesus Christ willed to be born as a helpless infant, because He wished to teach us that we also should be resigned to poverty and suffering. He came into this world in order to pay the penalty for our sins. Hence, He had to have a body and a soul capable of suffering. According to the decrees of divine justice He was to atone through self-abasement for our pride; for our sinful pleasure He suffered by sorrows; for our attachment to earthly possessions by His poverty; for our sensuality by the mortification of His body, and He was to give us life eternal by surrendering to a bitter and ignominious death. He comes to us as a little infant in order to awaken our tender love towards Him: He hides His Majesty so that men may approach Him without fear.

Jesus Christ wished to be born in want, that we may learn of Him how to bear poverty and suffering. The Son of God might have surrounded His cradle with luxury and magnificence. But He came not only to atone for our sins, but also to teach us the way of virtue; to show us the road to heaven; to be our Redeemer and our model. The stable wherein He was born, the crib wherein He was cradled, the tears which He shed, do they not speak to us powerfully of the truths which He came into this world to teach? His helpless state, His lowly resting place, the abandonment in which He finds Himself, how they condemn our pride and our vanity. His tears condemn our frivolous amusement; the hardships, the inclemency of the weather to which He was exposed, the cold He endured, how they all condemn our luxuriousness and our solicitude for comfort.

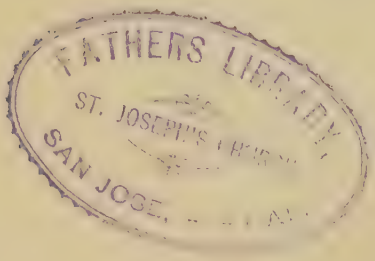
Let us then betake ourselves, dear brethren, to seek advice at the crib of the newborn Saviour. Let the poor go there and learn to

bless their lowly station, to overcome their impatience, to stifle their complaints. Would Jesus Christ have chosen poverty if it were the evil that the world imagines, if it were not on the contrary the surest way to heaven? You, who are not possessed of wealth, behold your God lying there in poverty and want. Praise God and thank Him for living in the same state as did your divine Saviour.

To the crib of the Infant Jesus let all go those who suffer trials and live in adversity. Contemplate there your divine model. He would suffer, to teach you by His example that the sure path to bliss and glory is hewn through a vale of sufferings.

Step up to the crib of the Infant Jesus, also you who are blessed with wealth, see there His humiliation and take to heart the lesson that you must become poor in spirit if you wish to obtain salvation. Beware of becoming unduly attached to your wealth; rather learn to gather treasure for heaven by using your temporal and passing wealth in God's holy service.

Let all of us observe this grand mystery of the birth of our divine Savior by abhorring sin and loving virtue. Let us despise those unholy enjoyments, which instead of giving gratification, lead to destruction. Let us, in conclusion, learn of the newborn Jesus to despise the passing pleasures of this world and to disengage our hearts completely from them. Let us employ all our energies in seeking for the things that endure, and let us strive to love God and to serve Him, so that at the end of our days the blessed Lord will graciously bid us to enter His glory. Amen.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